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International Fluctuations and Domestic Limitations: Turkish-Israeli Relations in the New Millennium

Abstract: Turkey was the first Muslim state to recognize Israel in 1949 and since this time, military and economic bilateral relations have grown exponentially, particularly since the election of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* in 2002. This evidence is indicative that, contrary to popular opinion, the AKP's purportedly Islamic identity did not stand in the way of creating ties with Israel based on geo-strategic, economic and security realities. Although this remains the case in Turkey, as a democracy, the government is not immune to changes in public opinion and thus has developed a populist discourse on this matter. Consequently, Operation Cast Lead, Davos and the Mavi Marmara incident have left Turkish-Israeli diplomatic and political relations frozen and caused a key divergence from Turkey's "zero-problems" policy in the region. Yet despite emphatic language, the divide between practice and discourse when it comes to Turkey's 'hard' stance towards Israel is stark. Although vocally critical of Israel's policies in Palestine, trade relations have remained immune to diplomatic difficulties and continue to increase under the AKP's jurisdiction. Consequently, this chapter will examine the disjuncture between the continuously strong trading and economic relations between Israel and Turkey in the light of the diplomatic ice age, examining the domestic and international factors which dictate said relations. In order to provide a comprehensive examination of both discursive and practical transformations in Turkish Foreign Policy behaviour and the political economy of the AKP, the function and effect of domestic ideational, historical and cultural variables must be examined. Such variables dictate the complex political opportunity structure in which the AKP operates, and consequently, define the future relations of these two important regional powers. Analysis of such contentious issues is increasingly important for understanding Turkey's decision-making processes. Turkey's future role as a regional power, as well as their EU accession bid is predicated on the normalization of Turkish-Israeli relations. Not only do Turkish-Israeli relations speak volumes about the nature and purpose of the AKP's power, but also implicitly define their limitations as a dominant actor in the international system.

Keywords: Justice and Development Party, Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkey-Israeli Relations.

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Introduction

Changes in foreign policy formation under the AKP have come under heavy scrutiny, particularly since the commencement of their second term in 2007 and the arguable demise of Davutoğlu's "zero-problems with neighbours" policy. Increasing economic and diplomatic relations with contentious countries such as Iran and pre-revolutionary Syria are supposedly reflective of a shift in Turkey's orientation from Western to Eastern facing. Equally, deteriorating diplomatic relations with Israel are often cited as demonstrative of this shift in axis regarding Turkey's foreign policy formation in the Davutoğlu era. Such reductionist and de-contextualised conclusions are generally based on the reflexive idea that an "Islamist" political party in Turkey will eschew Turkey's European identity and Western alliances to re-kindle neo-Ottoman hegemony in the Middle East, utilising the Israeli issue as its flag-ship upon which to consolidate pan-Islamic values. Although having lost most of its credibility within academic circles due to empirical incoherence since the election of the AKP, arguments regarding Turkey's shifting axis are still pervasive within the international policy-making community, with such Orientalist ideas visibly and palpably influencing policy and discourse on this matter which in turn, impacts upon the possible policy options and constraints facing the AKP. As such, this political rationale is at risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy or set of prescriptive axioms.

The main thesis of this chapter is that the current stagnation in Turkish-Israeli political relations is due to the democratisation of Turkey and the subsequent emergence of public opinion as a palpable factor in foreign policy formation. Moreover, as multiple interest groups emerge from Turkey's recently established public sphere, the actions of the state are increasingly subject to alternative contestation. This multitude of actors and alternative contestations sometimes leads to contradictory or seemingly schizophrenic policy-making. The democratic nature of both Turkey and Israel means that public opinion is an important parameter, defining and constraining policy options and the opportunity for concessions on both sides which has entrenched the recent freeze in diplomatic relations. Similarly, the growth of economic relations is motivated by domestic variables, and the continual attempts to fulfil the idealised, yet perhaps necessary goal of military, diplomatic and strategic cooperation between Turkey and Israel.

To understand Turkish-Israeli political relations in contrast with economic ties, this chapter will map and assess three crucial events since the election of the AKP; Operation Cast Lead in 2008, Davos in 2009 and, the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010. This will be tied into an analysis of discourse, practice and economic fluctuations during this time period in order to identify the AKP's foreign policy priorities and limitations. Moreover, this analysis will eschew the traditional dichotomies used regarding Turkey's foreign-policy of "East" versus "West", "secular" versus "Islamist" to take a more nuanced and holistic approach towards the asserted causality between public opinion, economic necessities and foreign policy formation in Turkey. Although Turkey's hybrid identity of both Muslim and secular is

undoubtedly a factor, such static characterisations do little for developing an in-depth understanding of Turkey's "political opportunity structure"¹, and moreover, are more often taken for granted than examined.

The existing approaches are too ahistorical and acontextual, overlooking the coexistence of thriving trade with political confrontation between Turkey and Israel. This paper will investigate the logic and decision-making behind this perceived dichotomy by examining closely the evolution of Turkish-Israeli relations from 2000 to 2012. In doing so, it will reveal that this bifurcation of relations is by no means contradictory but can be comprehended by using the "political opportunity structure." The use of the political opportunity structure for analysing Turkish foreign-policy is pertinent for a number of reasons. Firstly, the opening of the traditionally top-down Turkish state caused by economic liberalisation from the 1990s onwards allowed for increased "input" from social forces and non-state actors. Secondly, domestic and international changes to the political environment and state institutions between the 1990s and the 2000s, particularly EU accession, civilianisation of Turkey's decision-making process and a deteriorating peace-process, had a deep impact on the characteristics and goals of social movements and the state. Thirdly, increased economic performance in the new millennium saw the rising effectiveness of Turkish foreign-policy, and with it, a growing capacity of society to influence the decision-making process. However, the growing coordination between domestic social movements and state decision-making cannot be extracted from its international context. As such, I will synthesise my analysis of the domestic political opportunity structure with an assessment of the wider structural, systemic and environmental forces at work. As such, the chapter will utilise public opinion data as well as post-positivist, broadly social constructivist analysis which privileges so-called "low politics" as constitutive of decisions made at state level. The aim is to put forth a deeper analysis of Turkish-Israeli relations than can be accounted for in traditional realist-based, positivist research which continues to dominate in Western political and social science. Such an analysis eschews the traditional focus on systemic forces and material realities as the only variables motivating foreign policy decisions, although they are incorporated into the analysis in the latter section.

The reason for employing post-positivist research over traditional approaches to Turkish foreign-policy such as structural realism is due to the identified relationship between public opinion and foreign-policy discourse and practice in the AKP era. One of the core impacts of which is that economic ties between Turkey and Israel which contrast with state rhetoric are often played down or even hidden. The crux of this contention is based on this chapters examination of the stark dichotomy between Turkish-Israeli political deterioration and their blossoming economic relations, yet also on the consideration that the mentality behind

1 For details of this theory see; Tarrow, Sidney G. (2011) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Cambridge University Press.

both is to establish Turkey as a regional hegemon. Such an assessment is key to determining Turkey's future prospects as the vehement rhetoric abounding from the AKP regarding Israel is actually the core issue preventing this occurrence. Turkey's recent exclusion and alienation from crucial Israeli-Palestinian peace-talks being exemplary of this contestation. Concurrently, with Turkish-Israeli relations suffering such dramatic fluctuations, it is difficult to understand the difference between reality and rhetoric, as such this chapter will examine discourse in contrast and convergence with practices, to determine the role of both leaders and public perceptions of the self and the Other, which are filtered through social narratives and historical memory,² thereby playing an important role in the decision making process.

Erdogan and Netanyahu are enigmatic leaders who at once command, but are also subject to, public opinion. It will be argued that their original perceptions of each other, and subsequent framing of events, entrenched the current antagonistic opinion within their societies, and this continued outside of their control to dictate the policy options available to both parties. Such an analysis is important, both due to how leaders discourse on the Other has been assimilated into society, and also, due to societies' framing of events using moral rather than legal or political terms, as will be shown regarding Mavi Marmara. Such an analysis of image and belief systems of cognitive knowledge will highlight both the bottom up and top down aspects of foreign-policy formation, not only in an attempt to reveal the complex ideational, cultural and social variables influencing the decision-making process, but also to highlight where room for reconciliation lies; at societal rather than state level. Thus, four main concepts will be put across as the determinants of the fluctuations and limitations on Turkish-Israeli relations; narratives, frames, actor-understanding and public contestation, which interplay with regional and global dynamics to dictate the complex decision-making process of the AKP.

The End of the Golden Age

The convergences of Turkish and Israeli political identities and goals in the 1990s can be attributed to a few main factors which I will discuss, before going on to highlight the much more contentious and politically relevant divergences of the new millennium. In the 1990s, both Turkey and Israel perceived themselves as democratic outsiders in the region. They believed themselves to have mutual strategic interests in developing good economic, diplomatic and particularly military partnerships. Similarly, they have two of the most powerful military's in West Asia, due to their domestic and regional threat perception, particularly regarding the issue of Syria, funding and sheltering the PKK and posing a strategic threat to Israel due to an ongoing state of war between the two countries. This perceived

2 Taber, Charles S. (1998) "The interpretation of foreign policy events: A cognitive process theory", in Sylvan and Voss (eds.) *Problem Representation*, pp. 29-52.

threat led to a limited amount of intelligence sharing during the so-called golden age of the mid to late 1990s. In the post Cold War global context of regional threat-perception and domestic securitisation which took place both in Turkey and in Israel, such cooperation was logical and also, domestically acceptable due to its emergence in tandem with a seemingly viable peace-process between Israel and Palestine. Yet the alliance formed from such mutual interests failed to take into account the impact of the changing political environment regarding threat perception of key states such as Syria, Iraq and Iran. By linking cooperation with Israel so intimately to this securitised world view, once perception of what constitutes a threat to Turkey changed, relations with Israel were bound to deteriorate. Compounded by the rise of civil-society actors, increased media freedoms and a change in the balance of civil-military relations, the new millennium brought forth a changing political opportunity structure for the successive Turkish government; the AKP. This de-securitised perception no longer believed that Turkey was “surrounded on all sides by trouble.” or that “It is critical for [Turkey] to jump outside this circle of chaos and find friends in the region [and that] Israel was the perfect choice”.³ This meant that a strategic partnership with Israel became less imperative and more of a burden; the reason being the aforementioned emergence of public opinion as a defining constraint on state behaviour in Turkey.

International and domestic optimism regarding the progress made in the peace-process in the 1990s gave an element of social legitimacy to increasing relations with Israel in Turkey. However, this came to a decisive end with the start of the new millennium. In the early 2000s, the rise of Ariel Sharon’s administration, the death of the Oslo Peace Accords, and subsequent bloodshed of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, combined with the 2006 occupation of Southern Lebanon, brought forth collective historical memory of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, engendering growing anti-Israeli public opinion and a critical state discourse which would become the norm in Turkey. The development of more press freedoms encouraged and often entrenched such public consternation as successive Israeli actions in Gaza were televised and disseminated to the public, an act which simultaneously put pressure on the government to behave in accordance with public sentiments. The vast civilian casualties suffered by the Palestinians in Jenin refugee camp in 2002 was received in Turkey with outrage, making relations with Israel more difficult to justify domestically. The subsequent controversial statement by the Turkish Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit, which described these events as “genocide” may have done much for his domestic standing, but it also revealed to Israel the stark divide in threat perception, actor understanding and contrasting lenses through which the conflict was viewed in the two countries. Beliefs that profuse apologies on the Turkish side could have been enough to bridge this divide were quickly put an end to with the start of the Iraq war following shortly after, and the election of the

3 Balci, A. and Kardaş, T. (2012) “The Changing Dynamics of Turkey’s Relations with Israel: An Analysis of ‘Securitization’”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 105.

"Islamist" AKP. Both these developments brought about another major diversion from the "golden age" of strategic partnership and increased Othering, misunderstandings and rivalries.

The Iraq war was perhaps the first example of polarisation in Israeli and Turkish public opinion/policy formation. The Turkish public sphere was strongly against the war, in contrast with its Israeli counterpart. In 2003, the AKP was faced with the first international test of its leadership, identity and allegiance. The U.S requested permission for their military personnel to use Turkey as a base from which to attack Iraq. Arguments advocated by a number of U.S scholars suggest that Turkey made the decision not to allow U.S personnel in was based on concepts of Muslim Brotherhood, yet this argument does not hold up. Chomsky argues this point to the extreme, highlighting that the democratic and consultative process in Turkey far outstripped the American façade as the AKP was responding to public opinion, which notably stood at 95% against the U.S using Turkey as a base,⁴ with as many against the war in general.

If Israel believed Turkish policy regarding to Iraq was threatening, exactly the same could be said for Turkey. Israel's support for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, fracturing Iraq, was perceived as a highly threatening move to the integrity of the Turkish state. It was also a barely disguised move to keep Iraq, previously the leader of pan-Arabism, one of the most ideologically and physically threatening movements to Israel, divided, and thus weak. Given the rise of cross-border PKK attacks during the Iraq war, it is unsurprising that such support for an independent Kurdistan was not well received in Ankara. The subsequent derailment of the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership stemmed from these events. Having previously believed Turkey to be on the same side, Israel correctly took these first, and key, divergences in interests and approaches to West Asian security as a sign of things to come. The previous, and arguably short sighted and optimistic focus on the points where Turkish and Israeli policy converged was superseded by an era in which previously ignored divergences dominated the political discourse.

Turkey and Israel's perceptions and methodologies regarding the maintenance of regional stability, the meaning of alternate actors' behaviour and their concepts of threat-perception and alliance formation are based on cultural, geopolitical and strategic "realities", and thus have all been subject to dramatic changes in the new millennium. Due to a series of misperceptions, erroneous judgements and misevaluations of the political opportunity structure in which actors must each develop their individual foreign-policy, coping mechanisms and mutual strategic interests have seemingly dissolved. This is particularly applicable in Turkey, where desecurisation and civilianisation led the decline of military power, dramatically

4 Bell, A., "Interview with Noam Chomsky", *Hobo Magazine*, October 6th, 2003, Available at: <http://hobomagazine.com/post/26564542102/allen-bell-dr-chomsky-id-like-to-begin-this>.

altering the organisational framework of the decision-making process. As such, the organisational actors have changed, particularly due to the entrance of society into policy formation, and also, the emergence of the “Islamist elite”, which as an ideational Other to the Israeli government, altered their perception and rhetoric towards Turkey, and subsequently their policy too.

The Multi-Dimensional Foreign Policy

The new millennium brought forth a new activism in Turkish foreign-policy; Davutoğlu’s multi-dimensional, “zero problems with neighbours”. The subsequent failure of this approach to maintain good ties with all of Turkey’s Western and Eastern neighbours is often held up as an example of Turkey moving towards the East, or the equally over-used cliché, “turning its back to the West”. However, this chapter argues that the original impetus for this foreign-policy was in line with EU and NATO interests- to promote regional peace and security. Moreover, its failure has been exaggerated, although, by nature, this policy was flawed from the start. Maintaining good diplomatic relations with neighbours as contrasting as Iran and Israel is demonstratively impossible, an issue which Anat Lapidot-Firilla succinctly brought attention to by describing “zero problems” as “the impossible mathematical equation.”⁵

Although accurate to an extent, Lapidot-Firilla’s understanding of Turkish foreign-policy as reflective of naïveté and lack of experience is too scathing and ignores the complexities of the decision-making process in Turkey, as an emerging economic player accountable to public opinion. As such, its economic aims included diversification of its export markets due to the gap left by Europe’s recession. This chapter promotes an alternative understanding of the AKP’s decision-making process as one driven by a combination of public interest, material necessities and a dose of wishful thinking regarding normative moral statements aimed at Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. This position undermines Lapidot-Firilla’s elegantly phrased, if unsubstantiated assertion that “Turkish policy makers have adopted an outlook that sacrifices interests on the altar of absolute and universal morality”.⁶

Turkey’s “zero problems” policy stems from its very different perception of regional security issues and resolution methods than the one employed by Israel. Turkey is highly dependent on maintaining relations with contentious countries such as Sudan, Lebanon and particularly Iran, for much needed energy resources. Despite intense efforts to diversify due to pressure from U.S sanctions, Iranian imports currently stand at 20% of Turkey’s total natural gas consumption, a number increasing every year, with Iran providing a further 51% of Turkey’s crude oil resources. Turkey’s dialogue and diplomacy efforts with countries such as Syria and

5 Lapidot-Firilla, A. (2010) “Turkey: From State to Faith-Based NGO”, *The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute*.

6 Lapidot-Firilla, op cit.

Iran, and indeed attempts at conflict resolution between Israel, Syria and Hamas, represent the AKP's wish to establish Turkey as regional interlocutor but also its economic and security requirements. Furthermore, Turkey's perception of stability certainly includes Israel, which is also reflective of their interdependence regarding military cooperation and technological assistance, combating mutual terror threats, business and tourism partnerships, and energy and economic needs, which will be discussed later, in the final section of this chapter. However, Turkey also understands the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as one of the core obstacles to peace in West Asia, and as such, these strategic partnerships are being superseded by an era dominated by politicised and economically based decision making rather than the securitised cooperation of the "golden era."

Turkey's support of Iran's supposedly benign nuclear programme stems at least partially from its perception of Israel. Given Israel almost certainly possesses nuclear weapons, condemning Iran for enriching uranium for energy purposes seems hypocritical and counter-intuitive to Turkey. Similarly, Israel's perception of Turkey's relationship with Iran as precluding relations with Israel, due to Iran's constant denial of Israel's right to exist and provocative discourse to match, can be seen as one of the main triggers of deteriorating diplomatic ties. Turkey and Brazil's efforts in May 2009 to broker a deal in which half of Iran's enriched uranium could be exchanged for a Turkish medical research reactor and their mutual vote against increasing sanctions on Iran was interpreted within Israel as both a dangerous unilateral decision and as an example of Turkey's purported axis shift. However, this issue should be read as exemplary of Turkey attempting to establish itself as a core regional mediator, as despite eschewing Western policy regarding the nuclear issue, they have been key in the negotiations with Iran.

As with the Iran nuclear issue, Israel perceives Ankara's "friendly" relations with Hamas as a highly threatening development. However, Ankara's relations with Hamas are actually quite limited, possibly due to the lack of enthusiasm within the Turkish public sphere for this organisation.⁷ The AKP's tepid support is pretty much constrained to the world of rhetoric and Turkey certainly does not support them in any dangerous material sense such as through the provision of arms. Once again, the rupture in Turkey-Israeli relations caused by Ankara's relationship with Hamas is both exaggerated and a matter of Turkish public opinion. The Turkish population is highly reactive to developments in Gaza and the AKP, unlike Israel and most of the Western world, believe Hamas to be a legitimately elected (although certainly not desirable) government. As such, the policy of negotiating with Hamas directly is entirely pragmatic. Turkey has pushed for further involvement of Hamas in peace-talks, something Israel has unequivocally rejected.

Yet Turkey's understanding of the compelling reasons to negotiate with Hamas is no longer confined to "Islamist" governments, who are presumed sympathisers.

7 Pew Research Center, 2012 Survey Data, Available at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/databse/?indicator=35&country=224>.

This opinion is beginning to reach mainstream academic and policy analysis, as well as a variety of EU countries. Rather than viewing Turkey's mediation efforts as a negative development based on an Islamist ideology, they can instead be seen as an attempt by Turkey to continue its negotiating tactics with the aim of regional security. According to an interview with the International Crisis Group, a senior AKP official discussed the pragmatic motivations for facilitating dialogue with Hamas when Khaled Mashal visited Turkey in 2006, stating that; "To the extent we have influence over Hamas, we use it for positive purposes. When Khaled Mashal came to Ankara, we told him, 'now you've won an election, make the best of it, integrate; you're not just a resistance group any more; work within the system'. Hamas was ready for this but then came the [Western] policies of isolation [against Hamas] and the whole thing failed." The AKP apparently used this time in order to convince Mashal both of Israel's right to exist, and also of the benefits of pursuing dialogue as a means to conflict resolution. Such an example of the positive effects of Turkish mediation and the possibilities it opens up for future relations with both Hamas and Israel was also seen in 2011, when Turkey directly participated in brokering the deal with Hamas which finally ensured the release of captured Israeli soldier, Gilat Shalit, in exchange for over a thousand Palestinian prisoners of Israel, a portion of whom Turkey took in. Furthermore, despite Israel's criticism of Ankara-Hamas relations, this certainly cannot be viewed as one of the main factors leading to the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations, as that particular landslide did not really begin until, 2008 when Operation Cast Lead was initiated. The Turkish criticism which arose from this was not linked to Hamas's legitimacy or democratic credibility, but rather to the suffering of Palestinian civilians, which is assimilated into Turkish societies culture and history as an important national cause, and thus, was reflected in state discourse, in both secular and Islamic narratives. Nevertheless, this unilateral act aimed at endowing Hamas with a modicum of international legitimacy was very badly received in Israel, as both of symbol of the AKP's purportedly Islamic identity and as a decisive move away from coordinated decision making with the U.S and the EU; a sign of Turkey's axis shift.

The contrasting view taken here is that Turkish-Israeli relations were never on the stable ground they were perceived to be, thereby undermining the conceptualisation that the purportedly Islamist identity of the AKP is the primary, or even a minor motivation in the secession of diplomatic ties or are part of a broader shifting axis. The relationship was never one based on trust, ideational alignment or mutually enforced defence, rather it was a relationship of convenience. Thus, when public opinion hardened towards Israel, the lack of popular support for continued diplomatic ties led to their effective dissolution. Yet both countries continue to expand their economic relations at an ever increasing rate, seemingly defying norms of economic interdependence necessitating a level of political cooperation. Notably, Turkish-Israeli trade relations peaked in 2008 and again in 2010, coinciding with Operation Cast Lead and the Mavi Marmara incident respectively. Both these events initiated times of intense political instability between and within the

two countries, yet economic relations continued their growth, immune to political strife, an anomaly which will be discussed at length in the final section of this chapter.

Thus, both the implementation and effect of Davutoğlu's multi-dimensional foreign-policy can be said to be orientated towards economic development and regional stability, and not aimed exclusively at any country, particularly not only Turkey's "Muslim brothers". More accurate is that, as an effect of economic liberalisation from the 1990s onwards, the emergence of a strong and internationalised private sector and a rapidly expanding population, Ankara pushed its boundaries of foreign relations further than any previous administration in an attempt to diversify and expand trading opportunities. The development of a strong West Asian component of Turkish Foreign Policy emerged as part of Davutoğlu's three-pronged approach of "strategic depth" which "rests on its geographical and historical depth."⁸ This approach reveals both the mentality and the pragmatism behind Turkey's rekindling of Eastern relations and subsequent complex interdependence with contentious countries. This links to the role of perception in foreign-policy formation. The much espoused clichés about an Islamist government in Turkey leading the country back to the East were assimilated into Israeli foreign-policy, but really consolidated under Netanyahu when he was re-elected in 2009. The Israeli government perceived changes, such as Turkey's increasing relations with Iran, as demonstrative of this shifting axis proposition, and consequently, like a spurned lover, increased the confrontational rhetoric.

Nevertheless, there has been a palpable re-orientation of Turkish Foreign Policy and economic cooperation Eastwards which requires analysis. With the EU in financial meltdown and Turkey's disillusioned populace unwilling to go down with it, it would appear natural that Turkey should turn to its Eastern neighbours to solidify economic and political relations and take up a more active global economic role. Its doing so does not implicitly entail the end of Turkish-Israeli relations, despite having long created ruptures between Turkey and its Arab counterparts, nor is Turkey's new active economic policy a major variable defining these countries recent interaction. Instead, Turkish-Israeli relations, or lack thereof, are demonstrative of a different transformation in foreign policy formation, not based on an ideational Eastern orientation but rather on Turkish public opinion, increasing self-confidence regarding Davutoğlu's assertive foreign-policy and economic necessities. Moreover, the shift in economic relations eastwards actually encompasses Israel, as one of Turkey's main export markets outside of the EU. Notably, such practices come into direct conflict with Turkey's rhetoric, and as such, are not readily disseminated to the public.

8 "Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Interview by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu", Published in *AUC Cairo Review* (Egypt) on 12 March 2012, Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-published-in-auc-cairo-review_-egypt_-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa.

Religious identity plays almost no part in the AKP's foreign policy decision-making process, when compared to much more compelling factors such as public opinion, societal identities and event perception. Such assertions clash not only with mainstream Western discourse on Turkey's foreign-policy behaviour but also with secularist narratives inside Turkey. In fact, *Hürriyet Daily News*' contention that "the Islamist Erdoğan government... is clearly caught between burning hatreds – based on its religious ideology and seen most visibly in the case of Israel and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime – and the need to appear to be what it is not."⁹ is highly demonstrative of one part of the popular narrative on the AKP's foreign-policy decisions. This shows a remarkable lack of understanding of the complexities of the political opportunity structure and the capacity of statesmen to react as humans rather than national machines. If a "burning hatred" of Israel exists within the AKP, it most certainly hasn't dictated foreign-policy or even controversial diplomatic decisions. In fact, given the escalation of events since the Davos incident in February 2009, it remains surprising the Erdoğan's rhetoric has not been more vehement, both due to the personal insult that was the failure of peace-talks with Syria, Peres' denial of an apology over Davos, and most importantly, the lack of apology for Mavi Marmara until more than 2 years after the event, not to mention the regional support such denunciations of Israel engenders.

Furthermore, "a burning hatred- based on religious ideology" would seem to play into Orientalist ideas about a pre-determined and paradigmatic battle between Muslims and Jews. This has no resonance with the AKP's practice or discourse. Erdoğan has always been very clear about the difference between criticising the Israeli government, and being anti-Semitic; "The Israeli state and the Israeli people are separate issues. I always say that anti-Semitism is a crime against humanity."¹⁰ Referring to the AKP's religious ideals as a reason to be critical of Israel undermines the core issues of illegal occupation, settlement expansion and high civilian mortality, not to mention the ongoing blockade on Gaza which has been termed a measure of "collective punishment" by the United Nations Human Rights Council.¹¹ As such, rather than being caught between burning religious hatreds and a need to appear to be what it is not, the opposite seems to be true with the AKP: it is

9 "Playing with fire: Turkey will get burned", *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 21st 2013 (emphasis added), Available at: <http://www.Hurriyetdailynews.com/playing-with-fire-turkey-will-get-burned.aspx?pageID=238&nid=41542>.

10 "Ties With Israel Continue Based on Mutual Interests - Turkish PM", *BBC Monitoring Europe*, 16th February 2009, from Ertür, C. "A Zionist in Disguise: Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan's Phony Anti-Israeli Rhetoric", *Global Research*, November 30th 2012.

11 United Nations General Assembly, Report of the international fact-finding mission to investigate violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, resulting from the Israeli attacks on the flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian assistance. (Human Rights Council: Fifteenth session, September 2010) p. 13.

caught between pragmatic concerns, and a need to say what it cannot do regarding Israel. Criticism of Israel has been utilised strategically by the AKP, although not as extensively as in Arab countries, “for Turkish domestic political consumption.”¹² During the AKP’s first term, the level of economic, diplomatic and military cooperation between the two countries improved dramatically, negating the idea that an Islamic government’s religious identity precludes good relations with Israel. Thus, connecting these two dots (Islam being *a priori* anti-Israeli), in the linear fashion prevalent in Western political analysis seems ill-informed (not to mention ill-advised). This ideological straight jacket, which is employed selectively regarding Muslim rather than secular Turkish leaders or Christian democrats abroad, and the level of political culturalism it entrenches is a highly detrimental fallacy and. As aforementioned, has the capacity to become a self-fulfilling prophesy as Western and Israeli policy-makers perceive actions to be a result of ideational irrationality and respond accordingly.

The Aftermath: Operation Cast Lead

Israel and Turkey are two of the most militarised states in the developed world. They both rely on compulsory military service and had, until the new millennium, a highly securitised perspective of both internal and external actors. Thus, from the signing of the Joint Military Cooperation Agreement in 1996, Israel and Turkey enjoyed beneficial military cooperation, often used to demonstrate strength towards mutual enemies such as Syria. Since the Cold War onwards, Turkey and Israel have sustained a triad of military, intelligence and defence relations, and signed more mutual agreements under the AKP than any other government. However, from 2009 onwards, there has been a dramatic change of policy, best demonstrated in October 2009, when Turkey barred Israel from participation in joint military exercises, apparently due to the recent Operation Cast Lead. This is one of the first clear examples of public opinion actively conditioning Turkey’s foreign-policy behaviour. There was intense debate and anger in Turkey’s public sphere over Israeli actions during the catastrophic Operation Cast Lead, and particular contestation over why and to what purpose the Israeli air force should be included in training exercises during the Anatolian Eagle air force drill. As Erdoğan stated; “I could not deny the request of my people, it was in this direction.”¹³ This is a clear example of public and state discourse finally catching up to policy formation, and one of the first examples of the AKP endorsing public statements and protests. Erdoğan stated on public television soon after this event that; “Turkey has never, in

12 Landau, Jacob M. “Turkey’s Entente with Israel and Azerbaijan. State Identity and Security in the Middle East and Caucasus.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 47.6, 2011, p. 137

13 Quoted in: Balci, A. and Kardaş, T. “The Changing Dynamics of Turkey’s Relations with Israel: An Analysis of ‘Securitization’”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14, No. 2/2012, p. 116.

its history, been on the side of persecutors, it has always defended the oppressed"¹⁴, highlighting the dialogic ideology behind such controversial decision-making. Almost immediately after Turkey's display of dissatisfaction with Israel, Turkey joined in similar training activities with Syria, a sworn enemy of the Israel state with whom it has been at war since the 1967 war and Israel's subsequent occupation of the Golan Heights in 1967. This was undoubtedly the lowest point thus far in Turkish-Israeli military cooperation, and also, a sign of things to come.

Nevertheless, this low point by no means marked the end of joint Turkish-Israeli military activities, with Erdoğan purportedly stating that; "Our relations with Israel continue based on mutual interests. Those who leave the table in fury return to it with losses. Some have suggested that we end Israeli training flights in Konya... Indeed, our General Staff also announced that relations with Israel will continue in accordance with Turkey's interests. Military contracts and orders also remain in force. There are many agreements with Israel, old and new. These all remain in force. We have to be very careful in interstate relations."¹⁵ Joint military activities continued, including an Israeli-Turkey naval exercise in August 2009. Thus, the damage done here, regarding military partnerships at least, was minimal. Business continued as usual. However, Operation Cast Lead sparked the recent spiral in diplomatic tensions between Israel and Turkey for a less transparent reason than the Turkish public spheres anger or Erdoğan's condemnation; the crux of the issue was actually Turkish mediation efforts between Israel and Syria being thwarted and Israel's failure to inform Turkey of the forthcoming Operation Cast Lead.

In the day's preceding Cast Lead, Erdoğan had taken monumental steps to rekindle dialogue between Syria and Israel, holding multiple proximity talks in Ankara, during which Erdoğan believed some historic breakthroughs had been achieved. The final meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert occurred just days before Cast Lead, with no mention of the forthcoming disaster. When the incursion began, it was taken on a distinctly personal level, as an insult to Erdoğan's negotiation efforts. According to Erdoğan, "This operation, launched despite all of these facts, is also disrespectful to Turkey."¹⁶ Furthermore, following the election of Netanyahu, Turkey was neither thanked, nor asked to restart its mediation

14 "Turkey's Action Towards Israel Worry US", *Jerusalem Post*, October 17th 2009, Available at: <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1255694828871&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>.

15 "Ties With Israel Continue Based on Mutual Interests - Turkish PM", *BBC Monitoring Europe*, 16th February 2009, from Ertür, C. "A Zionist in Disguise: Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan's Phony Anti-Israeli Rhetoric", *Global Research*, November 30th 2012.

16 "Erdoğan angered by Israel's Gaza campaign," *Today's Zaman*, December 29th 2008, Available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-162602-erdogan-angered-by-israels-gaza-campaign.html>.

efforts,¹⁷ in another blow to the Turkey's self-understanding as a mediating power and trust in Israel.

Revealingly, Israeli and US discourse over Turkey's increasing ties with Syria, oft cited as demonstrative of the AKP's foreign-policy being dictated by Muslim solidarity are undermined by two crucial issues. Firstly, the AKP's early relationship with Syria was aligned with both EU and US discourse and practice of "rapprochement" and Davutoğlu's policy of "soft power". Secondly, Erdoğan's behaviour since the start of the crisis in Syria in 2011 has been fully on side with NATO and the EU, taking a more active role in preventing the expansion of the threat, something which has the potential to put Israel's existence in jeopardy. In fact, given the mutual threat to Israel and Turkey posed by both the current crisis and also the disturbing nature of many of the organisations who would be part of a post-Assad regime, it was remarkably short sighted on both Erdoğan's and Netanyahu's behalf that they failed to re-establish direct dialogue regarding this matter until the use of chemical weapons in Syria and increasing fear of regional spillover from this conflict changed the game. Amongst the other aforementioned factors, the Turkish-Israeli breakdown can also be attributed to Erdoğan's outright support for the Arab Spring in general, which was disturbing to Jerusalem. Although Syria and Israel have technically been at war since 1967, the status quo in Syria was by no means as threatening to Israel as the current political turmoil which has seen the first conflict in the Golan Heights for nearly 40 years. The regional shift in balance of power, disruption of the status quo antagonists and the emergence of new actors in Syria and Egypt, many of whom are from populist Islamist movements is far more dangerous to Israel. Consequently, Turkey's ongoing support, both rhetorically and with weapons and shelter, to the Syrian rebels is undermining Israel's stability in the region. However, a mutual interest in supporting the moderate Sunni rebels as opposed to the extremist militia also operating in the region can be seen as one of the primary motivation for the recent stabilisation of Turkish-Israeli relations. The changing political environment of Turkey and Israel may impel the full re-establishment of relations, due to their common interest in stabilising the region and particularly Syria, interestingly, the reason the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership was established in the golden age

It is fairly well acknowledged now in post-positivist social-science that politics often takes place at a much subtler level than diplomatic talks and foreign-policy narratives. The political significance of popular culture is the most obvious example of "semiotic practices".¹⁸ This refers to a process of meaning production through the use of language and culture as "systems of signification."¹⁹ When a culturally and

17 Inbar, E. "Israeli-Turkish Tensions and their International Ramifications", *Orbis* 55.1, 2011, p. 134.

18 Wedeen, Lisa. "Conceptualizing culture: Possibilities for political science", *American Political Science Review*, 96.4, 2002, p. 713.

19 Ibid, p. 714.

politically significant narrative emerges through bottom up rather than top down processes to become a national discourse, it are far more threatening due to the natural, and thus more entrenched nature of the opinion, and the decreased ability of the state to control subversive narratives. Such an event occurred between Turkey and Israel as a result of a popular Turkish TV series, "Ayrılık" (Farewell), which depicted IDF soldiers killing Palestinian children during Operation Cast Lead. This is now a popular narrative in Turkey, regarding the Israeli government's activities in Gaza and has a definitive impact on public opinion. The subsequent humiliation felt by Israel and inability to deal with this through normal diplomatic channels or through using a "hearts and minds" strategy led Israel to utilise its own semiotic practices to undermine to legitimacy of Turkish opinion on this matter. Turkey's ambassador to Israel, Ahmet Oguz Celikkol, was called to meet with Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister, Danny Ayalon, to discuss complaints regarding this show, which notably was aired by Turkey's public channel, Turkish Radio and Television. The presence of only the Israel flag (a break with normal diplomatic procedure) and the purposeful seating of the ambassador in a lower chair, a move which Ayalon drew the Israeli presses attention to, indicates that Ayalon set out to deliberately humiliate the ambassador, and by extension, the Turkish public. This move united the public, the AKP and even the CHP in resounding criticism, which in an important and almost unprecedented turn, actually impelled an apology from the Israeli government.

These contentious moves, the original humiliation and subsequent apology, can be said to have been motivated by public opinion and economic concerns respectively. Right wing and nationalist Israelis were outraged after the airing of the TV series, and Ayalon, as a member of the Yisrael Beiteinu party, believed his actions would endear him to public opinion. However, once Ankara threatened the secession of diplomatic and thus, rhetorically at least, economic relations as a reaction, Ayalon was pressured by the powers that be, namely Ehud Olmert, to issue this statement; "I had no intention to humiliate you personally and apologize for the way the démarche was handled and perceived... Please convey this to the Turkish people for whom we have great respect."²⁰ Time magazine wrote of this; "the strategic ties are driven by mutual national interests that trump internal politics." However, such artificial extraction of internal politics from national interest is a fallacy. Turkey's national interest in this case was to derive an apology which would placate the public sphere, a necessity in order to continue military, diplomatic and economic relations with Israel openly, something they can no longer do for precisely this reason. Thus, internal politics were not trumped by national interest, or vice versa, as they are mutually constitutive porous entities. The ongoing reduction of the public sphere, and more specifically, the role of public opinion in

20 Klein, A, "Israel and Turkey: Anatomy of a Dissing War" *Time Magazine*, January 14th 2010, Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1953746,00.html>.

limiting the possible actions of a state perpetuates the absence of holistic analysis regarding Turkey's foreign-policy behaviour, as such behaviour is entirely interdependent with societal, historical and ideational variables.

The incident at Davos, otherwise known as the "one minute" crisis, in which Erdoğan walked off stage during the World Economic Forum as a response to a perceived injustice from the moderator and angry rhetoric from Israeli President, Shimon Peres, gave a huge boost to the ideological legitimacy of Erdoğan. Both the rhetoric he used and his decision to walk off stage must be subject to interrogation as they are very revealing about the relationship between public opinion and state discourse in Turkey. Although Erdoğan undoubtedly takes a personal approach to the plight of the Palestinians, the overtly emotional language employed during this speech is resonant of propaganda. For example, although perhaps warranted, particularly in the eyes of the Turkish public, Erdoğan's statement to Peres that; "you are older than I am. But the volume of your voice is too high. And I know this is because of the guilt psychology... When it is time to kill, you know how to kill well. I know well how you kill children on beaches, how you shoot them"²¹, stands in sharp contrast to the diplomatic language usually employed by state leaders, even during such politically turbulent times. As such, the aim of Erdoğan's emotive language would seem to be mobilisation of the Turkish public. But to what ends given Turkey's previously discussed reliance on Israel for military and energy relations? This example of Turkey appearing to stand up in the face of Israeli impunity, and the subsequent emergence of this as a discursive norm in Turkey, is aimed at demonstrating to the people that democracy is effective and that the government is responsive. The approval rating of this event speaks volumes, with 81.7% supporting Erdoğan's remarks, and only 10.2 disapproving and a further 78.3% approving of the walkout.²² By voicing public sentiments during such a high level meeting, Erdoğan boosted his democratic and ideological legitimacy, both at home and abroad. Furthermore, with local elections shortly following this demonstration in March 2009, a more cynical motivation can be highlighted; that of political manoeuvring and voter manipulation. Between January the 26th and the 30th, after Davos, Erdoğan's approval rating sky-rocketed from 55% to 74%.²³

Similarly, Peres's demonstration after the incident seemed entirely conditioned by personal and state machismo and a need to salvage Israeli public opinion in his favour with elections forthcoming. In fact, Erdoğan pointed to this in an interview with the New York Times, directly after Davos, in which he made a much more forceful, nuanced and pragmatic argument for a cessation of violence and

21 World-January29-Switzerland-Davos-Peres, *Reuters*, January 29th 2009, Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/01/29/world-jan29-switzerland-davos-peres-erdo-idUS812520090129>.

22 "Davos Crisis", *Metropoll - Stratejik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar*, January 2009, Available at: <http://www.metropoll.com.tr/report/davos-crisis>.

23 Ibid.

accountability; “We have a serious relationship. But the current Israeli government should check itself. They should not exploit this issue for the upcoming elections in Israel.”²⁴ In a Turkish transcript of a phone-call between Peres and Erdoğan it was written that Peres apologised for his actions during Davos. Subsequently, the Israeli government issued a statement asserting that the words “I’m sorry” were never said by Peres.²⁵ Knowing whose account of events is true in this matter is both impossible and irrelevant. This became both a personal and a national matter of pride for the two leaders and consequently, concessions, apologies and meaningful dialogue were pushed to the side, replaced by egoism and competition.

The Aftermath: Mavi Marmara

The events which occurred on this fateful day are still held up to much contestation. As such, this chapter will focus not on attributing blame but rather reflect on the aftermath, and the effect this has had on Turkish-Israeli relations. Similar to the Davos incident, the game of blame attribution become irrelevant at a point, as the state discourse, whether truthful or not, become assimilated into a social/national narrative of events, preventing, until very recently, concessions on both sides due to national dignity and pride. By analysing the immediate reactions to the Mavi Marmara incident, attention is drawn to the polarity of Turkish and Israeli event interpretation and cognitive processing.²⁶ These, when combined with opposing organisational frameworks within each country, contrasting institutional norms and strong societal, media and military actors, produce an entirely different narrative and thus, policy regarding the shared events in question. The actors involved, explicitly, the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) were mobilised and operationalised due to a variety of political opportunities, notably, the recent Operation Cast Lead, critical Turkish, and notably, international condemnation of Operation Cast Lead and subsequent questioning of the legitimacy of the Gaza blockade, and furthermore, the rise of transnational human rights activism, resource sharing and alliances in the new millennium. It is interesting, and unprecedented, that a human rights based movement should have such a dramatic and detrimental effect on bilateral relations in Turkey. I will discuss briefly the specific political opportunity which allowed for this event to arise, based on Tarrow’s original model.²⁷ Firstly, the state had indicated it was open to societal contestation regarding Israel in the

24 “Palestine today is an open-air prison”, *The Washington Post*, January 1st 2009, Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/30/AR2009013002809_3.html.

25 Barak R, “Is this the transcript of Peres’ call to Erdoğan following the Davos spat?”, *Haaretz*, January 1st 2009, Available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/is-this-the-transcript-of-peres-call-to-erdogan-following-davos-spat-1.267121>.

26 Taber, Charles S., op cit. p. 32.

27 Tarrow, Sidney G. (1988), *Power in Movement*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 76- 80.

Harriet Fildes*

International Fluctuations and Domestic Limitations: Turkish-Israeli Relations in the New Millennium

Abstract: Turkey was the first Muslim state to recognize Israel in 1949 and since this time, military and economic bilateral relations have grown exponentially, particularly since the election of the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* in 2002. This evidence is indicative that, contrary to popular opinion, the AKP's purportedly Islamic identity did not stand in the way of creating ties with Israel based on geo-strategic, economic and security realities. Although this remains the case in Turkey, as a democracy, the government is not immune to changes in public opinion and thus has developed a populist discourse on this matter. Consequently, Operation Cast Lead, Davos and the Mavi Marmara incident have left Turkish-Israeli diplomatic and political relations frozen and caused a key divergence from Turkey's "zero-problems" policy in the region. Yet despite emphatic language, the divide between practice and discourse when it comes to Turkey's 'hard' stance towards Israel is stark. Although vocally critical of Israel's policies in Palestine, trade relations have remained immune to diplomatic difficulties and continue to increase under the AKP's jurisdiction. Consequently, this chapter will examine the disjuncture between the continuously strong trading and economic relations between Israel and Turkey in the light of the diplomatic ice age, examining the domestic and international factors which dictate said relations. In order to provide a comprehensive examination of both discursive and practical transformations in Turkish Foreign Policy behaviour and the political economy of the AKP, the function and effect of domestic ideational, historical and cultural variables must be examined. Such variables dictate the complex political opportunity structure in which the AKP operates, and consequently, define the future relations of these two important regional powers. Analysis of such contentious issues is increasingly important for understanding Turkey's decision-making processes. Turkey's future role as a regional power, as well as their EU accession bid is predicated on the normalization of Turkish-Israeli relations. Not only do Turkish-Israeli relations speak volumes about the nature and purpose of the AKP's power, but also implicitly define their limitations as a dominant actor in the international system.

Keywords: Justice and Development Party, Turkish Foreign Policy, Turkey-Israeli Relations.

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Introduction

Changes in foreign policy formation under the AKP have come under heavy scrutiny, particularly since the commencement of their second term in 2007 and the arguable demise of Davutoğlu's "zero-problems with neighbours" policy. Increasing economic and diplomatic relations with contentious countries such as Iran and pre-revolutionary Syria are supposedly reflective of a shift in Turkey's orientation from Western to Eastern facing. Equally, deteriorating diplomatic relations with Israel are often cited as demonstrative of this shift in axis regarding Turkey's foreign policy formation in the Davutoğlu era. Such reductionist and de-contextualised conclusions are generally based on the reflexive idea that an "Islamist" political party in Turkey will eschew Turkey's European identity and Western alliances to re-kindle neo-Ottoman hegemony in the Middle East, utilising the Israeli issue as its flag-ship upon which to consolidate pan-Islamic values. Although having lost most of its credibility within academic circles due to empirical incoherence since the election of the AKP, arguments regarding Turkey's shifting axis are still pervasive within the international policy-making community, with such Orientalist ideas visibly and palpably influencing policy and discourse on this matter which in turn, impacts upon the possible policy options and constraints facing the AKP. As such, this political rationale is at risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy or set of prescriptive axioms.

The main thesis of this chapter is that the current stagnation in Turkish-Israeli political relations is due to the democratisation of Turkey and the subsequent emergence of public opinion as a palpable factor in foreign policy formation. Moreover, as multiple interest groups emerge from Turkey's recently established public sphere, the actions of the state are increasingly subject to alternative contestation. This multitude of actors and alternative contestations sometimes leads to contradictory or seemingly schizophrenic policy-making. The democratic nature of both Turkey and Israel means that public opinion is an important parameter, defining and constraining policy options and the opportunity for concessions on both sides which has entrenched the recent freeze in diplomatic relations. Similarly, the growth of economic relations is motivated by domestic variables, and the continual attempts to fulfil the idealised, yet perhaps necessary goal of military, diplomatic and strategic cooperation between Turkey and Israel.

To understand Turkish-Israeli political relations in contrast with economic ties, this chapter will map and assess three crucial events since the election of the AKP; Operation Cast Lead in 2008, Davos in 2009 and, the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010. This will be tied into an analysis of discourse, practice and economic fluctuations during this time period in order to identify the AKP's foreign policy priorities and limitations. Moreover, this analysis will eschew the traditional dichotomies used regarding Turkey's foreign-policy of "East" versus "West", "secular" versus "Islamist" to take a more nuanced and holistic approach towards the asserted causality between public opinion, economic necessities and foreign policy formation in Turkey. Although Turkey's hybrid identity of both Muslim and secular is

undoubtedly a factor, such static characterisations do little for developing an in-depth understanding of Turkey's "political opportunity structure"¹, and moreover, are more often taken for granted than examined.

The existing approaches are too ahistorical and acontextual, overlooking the coexistence of thriving trade with political confrontation between Turkey and Israel. This paper will investigate the logic and decision-making behind this perceived dichotomy by examining closely the evolution of Turkish-Israeli relations from 2000 to 2012. In doing so, it will reveal that this bifurcation of relations is by no means contradictory but can be comprehended by using the "political opportunity structure." The use of the political opportunity structure for analysing Turkish foreign-policy is pertinent for a number of reasons. Firstly, the opening of the traditionally top-down Turkish state caused by economic liberalisation from the 1990s onwards allowed for increased "input" from social forces and non-state actors. Secondly, domestic and international changes to the political environment and state institutions between the 1990s and the 2000s, particularly EU accession, civilianisation of Turkey's decision-making process and a deteriorating peace-process, had a deep impact on the characteristics and goals of social movements and the state. Thirdly, increased economic performance in the new millennium saw the rising effectiveness of Turkish foreign-policy, and with it, a growing capacity of society to influence the decision-making process. However, the growing coordination between domestic social movements and state decision-making cannot be extracted from its international context. As such, I will synthesise my analysis of the domestic political opportunity structure with an assessment of the wider structural, systemic and environmental forces at work. As such, the chapter will utilise public opinion data as well as post-positivist, broadly social constructivist analysis which privileges so-called "low politics" as constitutive of decisions made at state level. The aim is to put forth a deeper analysis of Turkish-Israeli relations than can be accounted for in traditional realist-based, positivist research which continues to dominate in Western political and social science. Such an analysis eschews the traditional focus on systemic forces and material realities as the only variables motivating foreign policy decisions, although they are incorporated into the analysis in the latter section.

The reason for employing post-positivist research over traditional approaches to Turkish foreign-policy such as structural realism is due to the identified relationship between public opinion and foreign-policy discourse and practice in the AKP era. One of the core impacts of which is that economic ties between Turkey and Israel which contrast with state rhetoric are often played down or even hidden. The crux of this contention is based on this chapters examination of the stark dichotomy between Turkish-Israeli political deterioration and their blossoming economic relations, yet also on the consideration that the mentality behind

1 For details of this theory see; Tarrow, Sidney G. (2011) *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, Cambridge University Press.

both is to establish Turkey as a regional hegemon. Such an assessment is key to determining Turkey's future prospects as the vehement rhetoric abounding from the AKP regarding Israel is actually the core issue preventing this occurrence. Turkey's recent exclusion and alienation from crucial Israeli-Palestinian peace-talks being exemplary of this contestation. Concurrently, with Turkish-Israeli relations suffering such dramatic fluctuations, it is difficult to understand the difference between reality and rhetoric, as such this chapter will examine discourse in contrast and convergence with practices, to determine the role of both leaders and public perceptions of the self and the Other, which are filtered through social narratives and historical memory,² thereby playing an important role in the decision making process.

Erdogan and Netanyahu are enigmatic leaders who at once command, but are also subject to, public opinion. It will be argued that their original perceptions of each other, and subsequent framing of events, entrenched the current antagonistic opinion within their societies, and this continued outside of their control to dictate the policy options available to both parties. Such an analysis is important, both due to how leaders discourse on the Other has been assimilated into society, and also, due to societies' framing of events using moral rather than legal or political terms, as will be shown regarding Mavi Marmara. Such an analysis of image and belief systems of cognitive knowledge will highlight both the bottom up and top down aspects of foreign-policy formation, not only in an attempt to reveal the complex ideational, cultural and social variables influencing the decision-making process, but also to highlight where room for reconciliation lies; at societal rather than state level. Thus, four main concepts will be put across as the determinants of the fluctuations and limitations on Turkish-Israeli relations; narratives, frames, actor-understanding and public contestation, which interplay with regional and global dynamics to dictate the complex decision-making process of the AKP.

The End of the Golden Age

The convergences of Turkish and Israeli political identities and goals in the 1990s can be attributed to a few main factors which I will discuss, before going on to highlight the much more contentious and politically relevant divergences of the new millennium. In the 1990s, both Turkey and Israel perceived themselves as democratic outsiders in the region. They believed themselves to have mutual strategic interests in developing good economic, diplomatic and particularly military partnerships. Similarly, they have two of the most powerful military's in West Asia, due to their domestic and regional threat perception, particularly regarding the issue of Syria, funding and sheltering the PKK and posing a strategic threat to Israel due to an ongoing state of war between the two countries. This perceived

2 Taber, Charles S. (1998) "The interpretation of foreign policy events: A cognitive process theory", in Sylvan and Voss (eds.) *Problem Representation*, pp. 29-52.

threat led to a limited amount of intelligence sharing during the so-called golden age of the mid to late 1990s. In the post Cold War global context of regional threat-perception and domestic securitisation which took place both in Turkey and in Israel, such cooperation was logical and also, domestically acceptable due to its emergence in tandem with a seemingly viable peace-process between Israel and Palestine. Yet the alliance formed from such mutual interests failed to take into account the impact of the changing political environment regarding threat perception of key states such as Syria, Iraq and Iran. By linking cooperation with Israel so intimately to this securitised world view, once perception of what constitutes a threat to Turkey changed, relations with Israel were bound to deteriorate. Compounded by the rise of civil-society actors, increased media freedoms and a change in the balance of civil-military relations, the new millennium brought forth a changing political opportunity structure for the successive Turkish government; the AKP. This de-securitised perception no longer believed that Turkey was “surrounded on all sides by trouble.” or that “It is critical for [Turkey] to jump outside this circle of chaos and find friends in the region [and that] Israel was the perfect choice”.³ This meant that a strategic partnership with Israel became less imperative and more of a burden; the reason being the aforementioned emergence of public opinion as a defining constraint on state behaviour in Turkey.

International and domestic optimism regarding the progress made in the peace-process in the 1990s gave an element of social legitimacy to increasing relations with Israel in Turkey. However, this came to a decisive end with the start of the new millennium. In the early 2000s, the rise of Ariel Sharon’s administration, the death of the Oslo Peace Accords, and subsequent bloodshed of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, combined with the 2006 occupation of Southern Lebanon, brought forth collective historical memory of the Sabra and Shatila massacre, engendering growing anti-Israeli public opinion and a critical state discourse which would become the norm in Turkey. The development of more press freedoms encouraged and often entrenched such public consternation as successive Israeli actions in Gaza were televised and disseminated to the public, an act which simultaneously put pressure on the government to behave in accordance with public sentiments. The vast civilian casualties suffered by the Palestinians in Jenin refugee camp in 2002 was received in Turkey with outrage, making relations with Israel more difficult to justify domestically. The subsequent controversial statement by the Turkish Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit, which described these events as “genocide” may have done much for his domestic standing, but it also revealed to Israel the stark divide in threat perception, actor understanding and contrasting lenses through which the conflict was viewed in the two countries. Beliefs that profuse apologies on the Turkish side could have been enough to bridge this divide were quickly put an end to with the start of the Iraq war following shortly after, and the election of the

3 Balci, A. and Kardaş, T. (2012) “The Changing Dynamics of Turkey’s Relations with Israel: An Analysis of ‘Securitization’”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14, No. 2, p. 105.

"Islamist" AKP. Both these developments brought about another major diversion from the "golden age" of strategic partnership and increased Othering, misunderstandings and rivalries.

The Iraq war was perhaps the first example of polarisation in Israeli and Turkish public opinion/policy formation. The Turkish public sphere was strongly against the war, in contrast with its Israeli counterpart. In 2003, the AKP was faced with the first international test of its leadership, identity and allegiance. The U.S requested permission for their military personnel to use Turkey as a base from which to attack Iraq. Arguments advocated by a number of U.S scholars suggest that Turkey made the decision not to allow U.S personnel in was based on concepts of Muslim Brotherhood, yet this argument does not hold up. Chomsky argues this point to the extreme, highlighting that the democratic and consultative process in Turkey far outstripped the American façade as the AKP was responding to public opinion, which notably stood at 95% against the U.S using Turkey as a base,⁴ with as many against the war in general.

If Israel believed Turkish policy regarding to Iraq was threatening, exactly the same could be said for Turkey. Israel's support for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, fracturing Iraq, was perceived as a highly threatening move to the integrity of the Turkish state. It was also a barely disguised move to keep Iraq, previously the leader of pan-Arabism, one of the most ideologically and physically threatening movements to Israel, divided, and thus weak. Given the rise of cross-border PKK attacks during the Iraq war, it is unsurprising that such support for an independent Kurdistan was not well received in Ankara. The subsequent derailment of the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership stemmed from these events. Having previously believed Turkey to be on the same side, Israel correctly took these first, and key, divergences in interests and approaches to West Asian security as a sign of things to come. The previous, and arguably short sighted and optimistic focus on the points where Turkish and Israeli policy converged was superseded by an era in which previously ignored divergences dominated the political discourse.

Turkey and Israel's perceptions and methodologies regarding the maintenance of regional stability, the meaning of alternate actors' behaviour and their concepts of threat-perception and alliance formation are based on cultural, geopolitical and strategic "realities", and thus have all been subject to dramatic changes in the new millennium. Due to a series of misperceptions, erroneous judgements and misevaluations of the political opportunity structure in which actors must each develop their individual foreign-policy, coping mechanisms and mutual strategic interests have seemingly dissolved. This is particularly applicable in Turkey, where desecurisation and civilianisation led the decline of military power, dramatically

4 Bell, A., "Interview with Noam Chomsky", *Hobo Magazine*, October 6th, 2003, Available at: <http://hobomagazine.com/post/26564542102/allen-bell-dr-chomsky-id-like-to-begin-this>.

altering the organisational framework of the decision-making process. As such, the organisational actors have changed, particularly due to the entrance of society into policy formation, and also, the emergence of the “Islamist elite”, which as an ideational Other to the Israeli government, altered their perception and rhetoric towards Turkey, and subsequently their policy too.

The Multi-Dimensional Foreign Policy

The new millennium brought forth a new activism in Turkish foreign-policy; Davutoğlu’s multi-dimensional, “zero problems with neighbours”. The subsequent failure of this approach to maintain good ties with all of Turkey’s Western and Eastern neighbours is often held up as an example of Turkey moving towards the East, or the equally over-used cliché, “turning its back to the West”. However, this chapter argues that the original impetus for this foreign-policy was in line with EU and NATO interests- to promote regional peace and security. Moreover, its failure has been exaggerated, although, by nature, this policy was flawed from the start. Maintaining good diplomatic relations with neighbours as contrasting as Iran and Israel is demonstratively impossible, an issue which Anat Lapidot-Firilla succinctly brought attention to by describing “zero problems” as “the impossible mathematical equation.”⁵

Although accurate to an extent, Lapidot-Firilla’s understanding of Turkish foreign-policy as reflective of naïveté and lack of experience is too scathing and ignores the complexities of the decision-making process in Turkey, as an emerging economic player accountable to public opinion. As such, its economic aims included diversification of its export markets due to the gap left by Europe’s recession. This chapter promotes an alternative understanding of the AKP’s decision-making process as one driven by a combination of public interest, material necessities and a dose of wishful thinking regarding normative moral statements aimed at Israel’s treatment of Palestinians. This position undermines Lapidot-Firilla’s elegantly phrased, if unsubstantiated assertion that “Turkish policy makers have adopted an outlook that sacrifices interests on the altar of absolute and universal morality”.⁶

Turkey’s “zero problems” policy stems from its very difference perception of regional security issues and resolution methods than the one employed by Israel. Turkey is highly dependent on maintaining relations with contentious countries such as Sudan, Lebanon and particularly Iran, for much needed energy resources. Despite intense efforts to diversify due to pressure from U.S sanctions, Iranian imports currently stand at 20% of Turkey’s total natural gas consumption, a number increasing every year, with Iran providing a further 51% of Turkey’s crude oil resources. Turkey’s dialogue and diplomacy efforts with countries such as Syria and

5 Lapidot-Firilla, A. (2010) “Turkey: From State to Faith-Based NGO”, *The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute*.

6 Lapidot-Firilla, op cit.

Iran, and indeed attempts at conflict resolution between Israel, Syria and Hamas, represent the AKP's wish to establish Turkey as regional interlocutor but also its economic and security requirements. Furthermore, Turkey's perception of stability certainly includes Israel, which is also reflective of their interdependence regarding military cooperation and technological assistance, combating mutual terror threats, business and tourism partnerships, and energy and economic needs, which will be discussed later, in the final section of this chapter. However, Turkey also understands the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as one of the core obstacles to peace in West Asia, and as such, these strategic partnerships are being superseded by an era dominated by politicised and economically based decision making rather than the securitised cooperation of the "golden era."

Turkey's support of Iran's supposedly benign nuclear programme stems at least partially from its perception of Israel. Given Israel almost certainly possesses nuclear weapons, condemning Iran for enriching uranium for energy purposes seems hypocritical and counter-intuitive to Turkey. Similarly, Israel's perception of Turkey's relationship with Iran as precluding relations with Israel, due to Iran's constant denial of Israel's right to exist and provocative discourse to match, can be seen as one of the main triggers of deteriorating diplomatic ties. Turkey and Brazil's efforts in May 2009 to broker a deal in which half of Iran's enriched uranium could be exchanged for a Turkish medical research reactor and their mutual vote against increasing sanctions on Iran was interpreted within Israel as both a dangerous unilateral decision and as an example of Turkey's purported axis shift. However, this issue should be read as exemplary of Turkey attempting to establish itself as a core regional mediator, as despite eschewing Western policy regarding the nuclear issue, they have been key in the negotiations with Iran.

As with the Iran nuclear issue, Israel perceives Ankara's "friendly" relations with Hamas as a highly threatening development. However, Ankara's relations with Hamas are actually quite limited, possibly due to the lack of enthusiasm within the Turkish public sphere for this organisation.⁷ The AKP's tepid support is pretty much constrained to the world of rhetoric and Turkey certainly does not support them in any dangerous material sense such as through the provision of arms. Once again, the rupture in Turkey-Israeli relations caused by Ankara's relationship with Hamas is both exaggerated and a matter of Turkish public opinion. The Turkish population is highly reactive to developments in Gaza and the AKP, unlike Israel and most of the Western world, believe Hamas to be a legitimately elected (although certainly not desirable) government. As such, the policy of negotiating with Hamas directly is entirely pragmatic. Turkey has pushed for further involvement of Hamas in peace-talks, something Israel has unequivocally rejected.

Yet Turkey's understanding of the compelling reasons to negotiate with Hamas is no longer confined to "Islamist" governments, who are presumed sympathisers.

7 Pew Research Center, 2012 Survey Data, Available at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/databse/?indicator=35&country=224>.

This opinion is beginning to reach mainstream academic and policy analysis, as well as a variety of EU countries. Rather than viewing Turkey's mediation efforts as a negative development based on an Islamist ideology, they can instead be seen as an attempt by Turkey to continue its negotiating tactics with the aim of regional security. According to an interview with the International Crisis Group, a senior AKP official discussed the pragmatic motivations for facilitating dialogue with Hamas when Khaled Mashal visited Turkey in 2006, stating that; "To the extent we have influence over Hamas, we use it for positive purposes. When Khaled Mashal came to Ankara, we told him, 'now you've won an election, make the best of it, integrate; you're not just a resistance group any more; work within the system'. Hamas was ready for this but then came the [Western] policies of isolation [against Hamas] and the whole thing failed." The AKP apparently used this time in order to convince Mashal both of Israel's right to exist, and also of the benefits of pursuing dialogue as a means to conflict resolution. Such an example of the positive effects of Turkish mediation and the possibilities it opens up for future relations with both Hamas and Israel was also seen in 2011, when Turkey directly participated in brokering the deal with Hamas which finally ensured the release of captured Israeli soldier, Gilat Shalit, in exchange for over a thousand Palestinian prisoners of Israel, a portion of whom Turkey took in. Furthermore, despite Israel's criticism of Ankara-Hamas relations, this certainly cannot be viewed as one of the main factors leading to the deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations, as that particular landslide did not really begin until, 2008 when Operation Cast Lead was initiated. The Turkish criticism which arose from this was not linked to Hamas's legitimacy or democratic credibility, but rather to the suffering of Palestinian civilians, which is assimilated into Turkish societies culture and history as an important national cause, and thus, was reflected in state discourse, in both secular and Islamic narratives. Nevertheless, this unilateral act aimed at endowing Hamas with a modicum of international legitimacy was very badly received in Israel, as both of symbol of the AKP's purportedly Islamic identity and as a decisive move away from coordinated decision making with the U.S and the EU; a sign of Turkey's axis shift.

The contrasting view taken here is that Turkish-Israeli relations were never on the stable ground they were perceived to be, thereby undermining the conceptualisation that the purportedly Islamist identity of the AKP is the primary, or even a minor motivation in the secession of diplomatic ties or are part of a broader shifting axis. The relationship was never one based on trust, ideational alignment or mutually enforced defence, rather it was a relationship of convenience. Thus, when public opinion hardened towards Israel, the lack of popular support for continued diplomatic ties led to their effective dissolution. Yet both countries continue to expand their economic relations at an ever increasing rate, seemingly defying norms of economic interdependence necessitating a level of political cooperation. Notably, Turkish-Israeli trade relations peaked in 2008 and again in 2010, coinciding with Operation Cast Lead and the Mavi Marmara incident respectively. Both these events initiated times of intense political instability between and within the

two countries, yet economic relations continued their growth, immune to political strife, an anomaly which will be discussed at length in the final section of this chapter.

Thus, both the implementation and effect of Davutoğlu's multi-dimensional foreign-policy can be said to be orientated towards economic development and regional stability, and not aimed exclusively at any country, particularly not only Turkey's "Muslim brothers". More accurate is that, as an effect of economic liberalisation from the 1990s onwards, the emergence of a strong and internationalised private sector and a rapidly expanding population, Ankara pushed its boundaries of foreign relations further than any previous administration in an attempt to diversify and expand trading opportunities. The development of a strong West Asian component of Turkish Foreign Policy emerged as part of Davutoğlu's three-pronged approach of "strategic depth" which "rests on its geographical and historical depth."⁸ This approach reveals both the mentality and the pragmatism behind Turkey's rekindling of Eastern relations and subsequent complex interdependence with contentious countries. This links to the role of perception in foreign-policy formation. The much espoused clichés about an Islamist government in Turkey leading the country back to the East were assimilated into Israeli foreign-policy, but really consolidated under Netanyahu when he was re-elected in 2009. The Israeli government perceived changes, such as Turkey's increasing relations with Iran, as demonstrative of this shifting axis proposition, and consequently, like a spurned lover, increased the confrontational rhetoric.

Nevertheless, there has been a palpable re-orientation of Turkish Foreign Policy and economic cooperation Eastwards which requires analysis. With the EU in financial meltdown and Turkey's disillusioned populace unwilling to go down with it, it would appear natural that Turkey should turn to its Eastern neighbours to solidify economic and political relations and take up a more active global economic role. Its doing so does not implicitly entail the end of Turkish-Israeli relations, despite having long created ruptures between Turkey and its Arab counterparts, nor is Turkey's new active economic policy a major variable defining these countries recent interaction. Instead, Turkish-Israeli relations, or lack thereof, are demonstrative of a different transformation in foreign policy formation, not based on an ideational Eastern orientation but rather on Turkish public opinion, increasing self-confidence regarding Davutoğlu's assertive foreign-policy and economic necessities. Moreover, the shift in economic relations eastwards actually encompasses Israel, as one of Turkey's main export markets outside of the EU. Notably, such practices come into direct conflict with Turkey's rhetoric, and as such, are not readily disseminated to the public.

8 "Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Interview by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu", Published in *AUC Cairo Review* (Egypt) on 12 March 2012, Available at: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-published-in-auc-cairo-review_-egypt_-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa.

Religious identity plays almost no part in the AKP's foreign policy decision-making process, when compared to much more compelling factors such as public opinion, societal identities and event perception. Such assertions clash not only with mainstream Western discourse on Turkey's foreign-policy behaviour but also with secularist narratives inside Turkey. In fact, *Hürriyet Daily News*' contention that "the Islamist Erdoğan government... is clearly caught between burning hatreds – based on its religious ideology and seen most visibly in the case of Israel and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime – and the need to appear to be what it is not."⁹ is highly demonstrative of one part of the popular narrative on the AKP's foreign-policy decisions. This shows a remarkable lack of understanding of the complexities of the political opportunity structure and the capacity of statesmen to react as humans rather than national machines. If a "burning hatred" of Israel exists within the AKP, it most certainly hasn't dictated foreign-policy or even controversial diplomatic decisions. In fact, given the escalation of events since the Davos incident in February 2009, it remains surprising the Erdoğan's rhetoric has not been more vehement, both due to the personal insult that was the failure of peace-talks with Syria, Peres' denial of an apology over Davos, and most importantly, the lack of apology for Mavi Marmara until more than 2 years after the event, not to mention the regional support such denouncements of Israel engenders.

Furthermore, "a burning hatred- based on religious ideology" would seem to play into Orientalist ideas about a pre-determined and paradigmatic battle between Muslims and Jews. This has no resonance with the AKP's practice or discourse. Erdoğan has always been very clear about the difference between criticising the Israeli government, and being anti-Semitic; "The Israeli state and the Israeli people are separate issues. I always say that anti-Semitism is a crime against humanity."¹⁰ Referring to the AKP's religious ideals as a reason to be critical of Israel undermines the core issues of illegal occupation, settlement expansion and high civilian mortality, not to mention the ongoing blockade on Gaza which has been termed a measure of "collective punishment" by the United Nations Human Rights Council.¹¹ As such, rather than being caught between burning religious hatreds and a need to appear to be what it is not, the opposite seems to be true with the AKP: it is

9 "Playing with fire: Turkey will get burned", *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 21st 2013 (emphasis added), Available at: <http://www.Hurriyetdailynews.com/playing-with-fire-turkey-will-get-burned.aspx?pageID=238&nid=41542>.

10 "Ties With Israel Continue Based on Mutual Interests - Turkish PM", *BBC Monitoring Europe*, 16th February 2009, from Ertür, C. "A Zionist in Disguise: Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan's Phony Anti-Israeli Rhetoric", *Global Research*, November 30th 2012.

11 United Nations General Assembly, Report of the international fact-finding mission to investigate violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, resulting from the Israeli attacks on the flotilla of ships carrying humanitarian assistance. (Human Rights Council: Fifteenth session, September 2010) p. 13.

caught between pragmatic concerns, and a need to say what it cannot do regarding Israel. Criticism of Israel has been utilised strategically by the AKP, although not as extensively as in Arab countries, “for Turkish domestic political consumption.”¹² During the AKP’s first term, the level of economic, diplomatic and military cooperation between the two countries improved dramatically, negating the idea that an Islamic government’s religious identity precludes good relations with Israel. Thus, connecting these two dots (Islam being *a priori* anti-Israeli), in the linear fashion prevalent in Western political analysis seems ill-informed (not to mention ill-advised). This ideological straight jacket, which is employed selectively regarding Muslim rather than secular Turkish leaders or Christian democrats abroad, and the level of political culturalism it entrenches is a highly detrimental fallacy and. As aforementioned, has the capacity to become a self-fulfilling prophesy as Western and Israeli policy-makers perceive actions to be a result of ideational irrationality and respond accordingly.

The Aftermath: Operation Cast Lead

Israel and Turkey are two of the most militarised states in the developed world. They both rely on compulsory military service and had, until the new millennium, a highly securitised perspective of both internal and external actors. Thus, from the signing of the Joint Military Cooperation Agreement in 1996, Israel and Turkey enjoyed beneficial military cooperation, often used to demonstrate strength towards mutual enemies such as Syria. Since the Cold War onwards, Turkey and Israel have sustained a triad of military, intelligence and defence relations, and signed more mutual agreements under the AKP than any other government. However, from 2009 onwards, there has been a dramatic change of policy, best demonstrated in October 2009, when Turkey barred Israel from participation in joint military exercises, apparently due to the recent Operation Cast Lead. This is one of the first clear examples of public opinion actively conditioning Turkey’s foreign-policy behaviour. There was intense debate and anger in Turkey’s public sphere over Israeli actions during the catastrophic Operation Cast Lead, and particular contestation over why and to what purpose the Israeli air force should be included in training exercises during the Anatolian Eagle air force drill. As Erdoğan stated; “I could not deny the request of my people, it was in this direction.”¹³ This is a clear example of public and state discourse finally catching up to policy formation, and one of the first examples of the AKP endorsing public statements and protests. Erdoğan stated on public television soon after this event that; “Turkey has never, in

12 Landau, Jacob M. “Turkey’s Entente with Israel and Azerbaijan. State Identity and Security in the Middle East and Caucasus.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 47.6, 2011, p. 137

13 Quoted in: Balci, A. and Kardaş, T. “The Changing Dynamics of Turkey’s Relations with Israel: An Analysis of ‘Securitization’”, *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14, No. 2/2012, p. 116.

its history, been on the side of persecutors, it has always defended the oppressed"¹⁴, highlighting the dialogic ideology behind such controversial decision-making. Almost immediately after Turkey's display of dissatisfaction with Israel, Turkey joined in similar training activities with Syria, a sworn enemy of the Israel state with whom it has been at war since the 1967 war and Israel's subsequent occupation of the Golan Heights in 1967. This was undoubtedly the lowest point thus far in Turkish-Israeli military cooperation, and also, a sign of things to come.

Nevertheless, this low point by no means marked the end of joint Turkish-Israeli military activities, with Erdoğan purportedly stating that; "Our relations with Israel continue based on mutual interests. Those who leave the table in fury return to it with losses. Some have suggested that we end Israeli training flights in Konya... Indeed, our General Staff also announced that relations with Israel will continue in accordance with Turkey's interests. Military contracts and orders also remain in force. There are many agreements with Israel, old and new. These all remain in force. We have to be very careful in interstate relations."¹⁵ Joint military activities continued, including an Israeli-Turkey naval exercise in August 2009. Thus, the damage done here, regarding military partnerships at least, was minimal. Business continued as usual. However, Operation Cast Lead sparked the recent spiral in diplomatic tensions between Israel and Turkey for a less transparent reason than the Turkish public spheres anger or Erdoğan's condemnation; the crux of the issue was actually Turkish mediation efforts between Israel and Syria being thwarted and Israel's failure to inform Turkey of the forthcoming Operation Cast Lead.

In the day's preceding Cast Lead, Erdoğan had taken monumental steps to rekindle dialogue between Syria and Israel, holding multiple proximity talks in Ankara, during which Erdoğan believed some historic breakthroughs had been achieved. The final meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert occurred just days before Cast Lead, with no mention of the forthcoming disaster. When the incursion began, it was taken on a distinctly personal level, as an insult to Erdoğan's negotiation efforts. According to Erdoğan, "This operation, launched despite all of these facts, is also disrespectful to Turkey."¹⁶ Furthermore, following the election of Netanyahu, Turkey was neither thanked, nor asked to restart its mediation

14 "Turkey's Action Towards Israel Worry US", *Jerusalem Post*, October 17th 2009, Available at: <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1255694828871&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>.

15 "Ties With Israel Continue Based on Mutual Interests - Turkish PM", *BBC Monitoring Europe*, 16th February 2009, from Ertür, C. "A Zionist in Disguise: Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan's Phony Anti-Israeli Rhetoric", *Global Research*, November 30th 2012.

16 "Erdoğan angered by Israel's Gaza campaign," *Today's Zaman*, December 29th 2008, Available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-162602-erdogan-angered-by-israels-gaza-campaign.html>.

efforts,¹⁷ in another blow to the Turkey's self-understanding as a mediating power and trust in Israel.

Revealingly, Israeli and US discourse over Turkey's increasing ties with Syria, oft cited as demonstrative of the AKP's foreign-policy being dictated by Muslim solidarity are undermined by two crucial issues. Firstly, the AKP's early relationship with Syria was aligned with both EU and US discourse and practice of "rapprochement" and Davutoğlu's policy of "soft power". Secondly, Erdoğan's behaviour since the start of the crisis in Syria in 2011 has been fully on side with NATO and the EU, taking a more active role in preventing the expansion of the threat, something which has the potential to put Israel's existence in jeopardy. In fact, given the mutual threat to Israel and Turkey posed by both the current crisis and also the disturbing nature of many of the organisations who would be part of a post-Assad regime, it was remarkably short sighted on both Erdoğan's and Netanyahu's behalf that they failed to re-establish direct dialogue regarding this matter until the use of chemical weapons in Syria and increasing fear of regional spillover from this conflict changed the game. Amongst the other aforementioned factors, the Turkish-Israeli breakdown can also be attributed to Erdoğan's outright support for the Arab Spring in general, which was disturbing to Jerusalem. Although Syria and Israel have technically been at war since 1967, the status quo in Syria was by no means as threatening to Israel as the current political turmoil which has seen the first conflict in the Golan Heights for nearly 40 years. The regional shift in balance of power, disruption of the status quo antagonists and the emergence of new actors in Syria and Egypt, many of whom are from populist Islamist movements is far more dangerous to Israel. Consequently, Turkey's ongoing support, both rhetorically and with weapons and shelter, to the Syrian rebels is undermining Israel's stability in the region. However, a mutual interest in supporting the moderate Sunni rebels as opposed to the extremist militia also operating in the region can be seen as one of the primary motivation for the recent stabilisation of Turkish-Israeli relations. The changing political environment of Turkey and Israel may impel the full re-establishment of relations, due to their common interest in stabilising the region and particularly Syria, interestingly, the reason the Turkish-Israeli strategic partnership was established in the golden age

It is fairly well acknowledged now in post-positivist social-science that politics often takes place at a much subtler level than diplomatic talks and foreign-policy narratives. The political significance of popular culture is the most obvious example of "semiotic practices".¹⁸ This refers to a process of meaning production through the use of language and culture as "systems of signification."¹⁹ When a culturally and

17 Inbar, E. "Israeli-Turkish Tensions and their International Ramifications", *Orbis* 55.1, 2011, p. 134.

18 Wedeen, Lisa. "Conceptualizing culture: Possibilities for political science", *American Political Science Review*, 96.4, 2002, p. 713.

19 Ibid, p. 714.

politically significant narrative emerges through bottom up rather than top down processes to become a national discourse, it are far more threatening due to the natural, and thus more entrenched nature of the opinion, and the decreased ability of the state to control subversive narratives. Such an event occurred between Turkey and Israel as a result of a popular Turkish TV series, "Ayrılık" (Farewell), which depicted IDF soldiers killing Palestinian children during Operation Cast Lead. This is now a popular narrative in Turkey, regarding the Israeli government's activities in Gaza and has a definitive impact on public opinion. The subsequent humiliation felt by Israel and inability to deal with this through normal diplomatic channels or through using a "hearts and minds" strategy led Israel to utilise its own semiotic practices to undermine to legitimacy of Turkish opinion on this matter. Turkey's ambassador to Israel, Ahmet Oguz Celikkol, was called to meet with Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister, Danny Ayalon, to discuss complaints regarding this show, which notably was aired by Turkey's public channel, Turkish Radio and Television. The presence of only the Israel flag (a break with normal diplomatic procedure) and the purposeful seating of the ambassador in a lower chair, a move which Ayalon drew the Israeli presses attention to, indicates that Ayalon set out to deliberately humiliate the ambassador, and by extension, the Turkish public. This move united the public, the AKP and even the CHP in resounding criticism, which in an important and almost unprecedented turn, actually impelled an apology from the Israeli government.

These contentious moves, the original humiliation and subsequent apology, can be said to have been motivated by public opinion and economic concerns respectively. Right wing and nationalist Israelis were outraged after the airing of the TV series, and Ayalon, as a member of the Yisrael Beitenu party, believed his actions would endear him to public opinion. However, once Ankara threatened the secession of diplomatic and thus, rhetorically at least, economic relations as a reaction, Ayalon was pressured by the powers that be, namely Ehud Olmert, to issue this statement; "I had no intention to humiliate you personally and apologize for the way the démarche was handled and perceived... Please convey this to the Turkish people for whom we have great respect."²⁰ Time magazine wrote of this; "the strategic ties are driven by mutual national interests that trump internal politics." However, such artificial extraction of internal politics from national interest is a fallacy. Turkey's national interest in this case was to derive an apology which would placate the public sphere, a necessity in order to continue military, diplomatic and economic relations with Israel openly, something they can no longer do for precisely this reason. Thus, internal politics were not trumped by national interest, or vice versa, as they are mutually constitutive porous entities. The ongoing reduction of the public sphere, and more specifically, the role of public opinion in

20 Klein, A, "Israel and Turkey: Anatomy of a Dissing War" *Time Magazine*, January 14th 2010, Available at: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1953746,00.html>.

limiting the possible actions of a state perpetuates the absence of holistic analysis regarding Turkey's foreign-policy behaviour, as such behaviour is entirely interdependent with societal, historical and ideational variables.

The incident at Davos, otherwise known as the "one minute" crisis, in which Erdoğan walked off stage during the World Economic Forum as a response to a perceived injustice from the moderator and angry rhetoric from Israeli President, Shimon Peres, gave a huge boost to the ideological legitimacy of Erdoğan. Both the rhetoric he used and his decision to walk off stage must be subject to interrogation as they are very revealing about the relationship between public opinion and state discourse in Turkey. Although Erdoğan undoubtedly takes a personal approach to the plight of the Palestinians, the overtly emotional language employed during this speech is resonant of propaganda. For example, although perhaps warranted, particularly in the eyes of the Turkish public, Erdoğan's statement to Peres that; "you are older than I am. But the volume of your voice is too high. And I know this is because of the guilt psychology... When it is time to kill, you know how to kill well. I know well how you kill children on beaches, how you shoot them"²¹, stands in sharp contrast to the diplomatic language usually employed by state leaders, even during such politically turbulent times. As such, the aim of Erdoğan's emotive language would seem to be mobilisation of the Turkish public. But to what ends given Turkey's previously discussed reliance on Israel for military and energy relations? This example of Turkey appearing to stand up in the face of Israeli impunity, and the subsequent emergence of this as a discursive norm in Turkey, is aimed at demonstrating to the people that democracy is effective and that the government is responsive. The approval rating of this event speaks volumes, with 81.7% supporting Erdoğan's remarks, and only 10.2 disapproving and a further 78.3% approving of the walkout.²² By voicing public sentiments during such a high level meeting, Erdoğan boosted his democratic and ideological legitimacy, both at home and abroad. Furthermore, with local elections shortly following this demonstration in March 2009, a more cynical motivation can be highlighted; that of political manoeuvring and voter manipulation. Between January the 26th and the 30th, after Davos, Erdoğan's approval rating sky-rocketed from 55% to 74%.²³

Similarly, Peres's demonstration after the incident seemed entirely conditioned by personal and state machismo and a need to salvage Israeli public opinion in his favour with elections forthcoming. In fact, Erdoğan pointed to this in an interview with the New York Times, directly after Davos, in which he made a much more forceful, nuanced and pragmatic argument for a cessation of violence and

21 World-January29-Switzerland-Davos-Peres, *Reuters*, January 29th 2009, Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/01/29/world-jan29-switzerland-davos-peres-erdo-idUS812520090129>.

22 "Davos Crisis", *Metropoll - Stratejik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar*, January 2009, Available at: <http://www.metropoll.com.tr/report/davos-crisis>.

23 Ibid.

accountability; “We have a serious relationship. But the current Israeli government should check itself. They should not exploit this issue for the upcoming elections in Israel.”²⁴ In a Turkish transcript of a phone-call between Peres and Erdoğan it was written that Peres apologised for his actions during Davos. Subsequently, the Israeli government issued a statement asserting that the words “I’m sorry” were never said by Peres.²⁵ Knowing whose account of events is true in this matter is both impossible and irrelevant. This became both a personal and a national matter of pride for the two leaders and consequently, concessions, apologies and meaningful dialogue were pushed to the side, replaced by egoism and competition.

The Aftermath: Mavi Marmara

The events which occurred on this fateful day are still held up to much contestation. As such, this chapter will focus not on attributing blame but rather reflect on the aftermath, and the effect this has had on Turkish-Israeli relations. Similar to the Davos incident, the game of blame attribution become irrelevant at a point, as the state discourse, whether truthful or not, become assimilated into a social/national narrative of events, preventing, until very recently, concessions on both sides due to national dignity and pride. By analysing the immediate reactions to the Mavi Marmara incident, attention is drawn to the polarity of Turkish and Israeli event interpretation and cognitive processing.²⁶ These, when combined with opposing organisational frameworks within each country, contrasting institutional norms and strong societal, media and military actors, produce an entirely different narrative and thus, policy regarding the shared events in question. The actors involved, explicitly, the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) were mobilised and operationalised due to a variety of political opportunities, notably, the recent Operation Cast Lead, critical Turkish, and notably, international condemnation of Operation Cast Lead and subsequent questioning of the legitimacy of the Gaza blockade, and furthermore, the rise of transnational human rights activism, resource sharing and alliances in the new millennium. It is interesting, and unprecedented, that a human rights based movement should have such a dramatic and detrimental effect on bilateral relations in Turkey. I will discuss briefly the specific political opportunity which allowed for this event to arise, based on Tarrow’s original model.²⁷ Firstly, the state had indicated it was open to societal contestation regarding Israel in the

24 “Palestine today is an open-air prison”, *The Washington Post*, January 1st 2009, Available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/30/AR2009013002809_3.html.

25 Barak R, “Is this the transcript of Peres’ call to Erdoğan following the Davos spat?”, *Haaretz*, January 1st 2009, Available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/is-this-the-transcript-of-peres-call-to-erdogan-following-davos-spat-1.267121>.

26 Taber, Charles S., op cit. p. 32.

27 Tarrow, Sidney G. (1988), *Power in Movement*, New York: Cambridge University Press, pp. 76- 80.

aftermath of Operation Cast Lead. Secondly, the stability of the Turkish-Israeli alignment was already being challenged by the government, leaving further room for societal subversion. Thirdly, the international reaction to Cast Lead brought forward a number of social organisations whom the IHH and others could ally and share resources/knowledge with. Finally, there was not only division within the AKP on how to handle this issue, but actual support, with some members of parliament intending on joining the flotilla, highlighting the openness of the Turkish government and facilitation of protest activities by the state.

A lesser known occurrence preceding this catastrophe was the efforts made by the Turkish government in the lead up to the flotilla's departure. Initially the government aimed at preventing the flotilla from leaving and when it became apparent this would not be possible, efforts were made to negotiate with both the Israeli government and the leaders of the Mavi Marmara to ensure that if difficulties occurred, the ships would turn back towards the Egyptian port of al-Arish, unharmed. According to an interview by International Crisis Group with Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, he was requested not to go directly to Gaza on the basis of already deteriorating relations with Israel due to Turkish objection to increasing sanctions on Iran.²⁸ Nevertheless, the flotilla departed, according to the Turkish government, alongside assurances from Israel that unwarranted force would not be used.²⁹ The subsequent death of 8 Turkish citizens and an American citizen with Turkish heritage caused understandable outrage in Ankara, read as insulting on multiple layers and at least partially due to the previously reached agreement of non-violence.³⁰ Davutoğlu stated to the United Nations Security Council that; "This is tantamount to banditry and piracy. It is murder conducted by a State. It has no excuses, no justification whatsoever ... And Israel has blood on its hands This is a black day in the history of humanity, where the distance between terrorists and States has been blurred".³¹ If Turkey's understanding precluded grey areas, so did Israel's, who believed their actions to be legal, self-defence, and in its national interest.

The fact this event occurred in international waters added insult to injury as far as the Turkish government and public were concerned. As such, there was an immediate and unequivocal call for a credible investigation, an apology from Israel, compensation for the families of the dead and an end to the blockade on Gaza, ending with the statement that "Turkey will evaluate her relations with Israel

28 "Turkey's Crisis over Israel and Iran", *International Crisis Group: Europe Report No: 208 - 8 September 2010*. p. 10.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 "Full text of Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's speech in UN Security Council," *Sunday's Zaman*, June 1st 2010, Available at: http://www.todayszaman.com/news-Detail_getNewsById.action?load=detay&link=211758.

according to the response of Israeli Government to these conditions.”³² Nearly a year later, Israel’s failure to fulfil any of these requirements and with the additional insult of the findings of the UN commissioned Palmer report, Turkey began the legal processes which paved the way for the current state of affairs. Ankara initiated unprecedented sanctions against Israel, expelling the Israeli ambassador in September 2011, reducing diplomatic relations to the level of “second secretary”; which is close to non-existent, as revealingly, if unhelpfully, demonstrated by the lack of details regarding Turkish-Israeli bilateral relations of any kind on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website.

Davutoğlu stated during a press conference in Ankara, that; “The time has come for Israel to pay for its stance that sees it above international laws and disregards human conscience... The first and foremost result is that Israel is going to be devoid of Turkey’s friendship.”³³ Erdoğan pledged his legal and financial support to the families of those aboard the ship to pursue justice against Israel soldiers, a pledge which culminated in a highly publicised, if futile trial in Istanbul, to the consternation of Israeli officials. Additionally, Turkey discussed taking Israel to the International Court of Justice over the blockade, a discursive move which further destroyed political relations. Contentiously, Erdoğan also promised that to ensure freedom of navigation, future flotillas to Gaza would be accompanied by Turkish war-ships, a promise he has failed to fulfil thankfully, as it would be read in Israel as tantamount to a declaration of war. After the publication of the Palmer report, Ankara stated that all military agreements would be cancelled, having already cancelled three main military exercises directly after the incident; the land force- “Pigeon of Peace”, naval- “Reliant Mermaid” which had been taking place since 1998, and finally, the “Natural Disaster Preparedness Operation”. However, cooperation between Turkey and Israel continued when actual disasters arise such as Turkish helicopters deployed for assistance during the Haifa fires in December 2010 and Israeli aid during the Van earthquake of 2011. Nevertheless, further defence and intelligence cooperation was scaled back, most notably, Israel’s use of Turkish air-space. Strikingly, although putting an end to joint military activities, defence contracts, unlike energy and water contracts, continued relatively unharmed.

The issue was perceived in Turkey as related to Israel’s on-going refusal to make any concessions relating to occupied Palestinian territory and lack of progress regarding the stagnant peace-process. On the other hand, Turkey’s unequivocal discursive if not material support for the Palestinians is perceived in Israel as reflective of ideologically based policy-making. This is seen as a highly

32 “Blatant violation of international law by Israel: the attack on the freedom flotilla facts”, *Turkish foreign ministry*, June 2010, Available at: <http://vasington.be.mfa.gov.tr/images/localCache/1/b15prjzpaplfysi5nz31z4qmFreedom%20Flotilla.pdf>.

33 “Turkey expels Israeli diplomats, suspends military ties after UN report”, *Today’s Zaman*, September 2nd 2011, Available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-255543-turkey-downgrades-ties-with-israel-suspends-military-agreements.html>.

aftermath of Operation Cast Lead. Secondly, the stability of the Turkish-Israeli alignment was already being challenged by the government, leaving further room for societal subversion. Thirdly, the international reaction to Cast Lead brought forward a number of social organisations whom the IHH and others could ally and share resources/knowledge with. Finally, there was not only division within the AKP on how to handle this issue, but actual support, with some members of parliament intending on joining the flotilla, highlighting the openness of the Turkish government and facilitation of protest activities by the state.

A lesser known occurrence preceding this catastrophe was the efforts made by the Turkish government in the lead up to the flotilla's departure. Initially the government aimed at preventing the flotilla from leaving and when it became apparent this would not be possible, efforts were made to negotiate with both the Israeli government and the leaders of the Mavi Marmara to ensure that if difficulties occurred, the ships would turn back towards the Egyptian port of al-Arish, unharmed. According to an interview by International Crisis Group with Ahmet Emin Dağ, IHH Middle East coordinator, he was requested not to go directly to Gaza on the basis of already deteriorating relations with Israel due to Turkish objection to increasing sanctions on Iran.²⁸ Nevertheless, the flotilla departed, according to the Turkish government, alongside assurances from Israel that unwarranted force would not be used.²⁹ The subsequent death of 8 Turkish citizens and an American citizen with Turkish heritage caused understandable outrage in Ankara, read as insulting on multiple layers and at least partially due to the previously reached agreement of non-violence.³⁰ Davutoğlu stated to the United Nations Security Council that; "This is tantamount to banditry and piracy. It is murder conducted by a State. It has no excuses, no justification whatsoever ... And Israel has blood on its hands This is a black day in the history of humanity, where the distance between terrorists and States has been blurred".³¹ If Turkey's understanding precluded grey areas, so did Israel's, who believed their actions to be legal, self-defence, and in its national interest.

The fact this event occurred in international waters added insult to injury as far as the Turkish government and public were concerned. As such, there was an immediate and unequivocal call for a credible investigation, an apology from Israel, compensation for the families of the dead and an end to the blockade on Gaza, ending with the statement that "Turkey will evaluate her relations with Israel

28 "Turkey's Crisis over Israel and Iran", *International Crisis Group: Europe Report No: 208 - 8 September 2010*. p. 10.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 "Full text of Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's speech in UN Security Council," *Sunday's Zaman*, June 1st 2010, Available at: http://www.todayszaman.com/news-Detail_getNewsById.action?load=detay&link=211758.

according to the response of Israeli Government to these conditions.”³² Nearly a year later, Israel’s failure to fulfil any of these requirements and with the additional insult of the findings of the UN commissioned Palmer report, Turkey began the legal processes which paved the way for the current state of affairs. Ankara initiated unprecedented sanctions against Israel, expelling the Israeli ambassador in September 2011, reducing diplomatic relations to the level of “second secretary”; which is close to non-existent, as revealingly, if unhelpfully, demonstrated by the lack of details regarding Turkish-Israeli bilateral relations of any kind on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website.

Davutoğlu stated during a press conference in Ankara, that; “The time has come for Israel to pay for its stance that sees it above international laws and disregards human conscience... The first and foremost result is that Israel is going to be devoid of Turkey’s friendship.”³³ Erdoğan pledged his legal and financial support to the families of those aboard the ship to pursue justice against Israel soldiers, a pledge which culminated in a highly publicised, if futile trial in Istanbul, to the consternation of Israeli officials. Additionally, Turkey discussed taking Israel to the International Court of Justice over the blockade, a discursive move which further destroyed political relations. Contentiously, Erdoğan also promised that to ensure freedom of navigation, future flotillas to Gaza would be accompanied by Turkish war-ships, a promise he has failed to fulfil thankfully, as it would be read in Israel as tantamount to a declaration of war. After the publication of the Palmer report, Ankara stated that all military agreements would be cancelled, having already cancelled three main military exercises directly after the incident; the land force- “Pigeon of Peace”, naval- “Reliant Mermaid” which had been taking place since 1998, and finally, the “Natural Disaster Preparedness Operation”. However, cooperation between Turkey and Israel continued when actual disasters arise such as Turkish helicopters deployed for assistance during the Haifa fires in December 2010 and Israeli aid during the Van earthquake of 2011. Nevertheless, further defence and intelligence cooperation was scaled back, most notably, Israel’s use of Turkish air-space. Strikingly, although putting an end to joint military activities, defence contracts, unlike energy and water contracts, continued relatively unharmed.

The issue was perceived in Turkey as related to Israel’s on-going refusal to make any concessions relating to occupied Palestinian territory and lack of progress regarding the stagnant peace-process. On the other hand, Turkey’s unequivocal discursive if not material support for the Palestinians is perceived in Israel as reflective of ideologically based policy-making. This is seen as a highly

32 “Blatant violation of international law by Israel: the attack on the freedom flotilla facts”, *Turkish foreign ministry*, June 2010, Available at: <http://vasington.be.mfa.gov.tr/images/localCache/1/b15prjzpaplfysi5nz31z4qmFreedom%20Flotilla.pdf>.

33 “Turkey expels Israeli diplomats, suspends military ties after UN report”, *Today’s Zaman*, September 2nd 2011, Available at: <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-255543-turkey-downgrades-ties-with-israel-suspends-military-agreements.html>.

threatening development given Turkey has long stood as Israel's only Muslim ally and regional ally more broadly. However, these issues require a more nuanced analysis. Turkey's strategic and economic proximity to contentious actors in West Asia; particularly Iran and Hamas, impel it to take a more active role in mediation and negotiation efforts. Similarly, a reactive public sphere regarding developments in Gaza and the Mavi Marmara incident should be seen as a distinctive pressure on the AKP to utilise the fiery discourse which has now become the norm. This attack was perceived as directed against civil-society actors which "left an indelible mark in the hearts and minds of the Turkish people"³⁴ according to Davutoğlu. The Mavi Marmara incident provoked a strong and consolidated reaction in the Turkish public sphere, including widespread protests and direct pressure from civil organisations to cut all ties with Israel. Importantly, the Turkish public resoundingly read this attack as aimed at undermining Erdoğan's, and thus, Turkey's, domestic and international credibility (45.4 %),³⁵ rather than as related to security concerns. Such a narrative has become prevalent, with the public understanding of Israeli actions such as the "low chair incident" and Mavi Marmara as aimed at inhibiting Turkey's regional and domestic development and power. Strikingly, 60.6% of the Turkish public were not satisfied with the AKP's reaction to the attack according to a public opinion survey conducted by Metropol- Strategic and Social Research Center.³⁶ Given that 63.6 % of the Turkish public in 2010 believed that Turkey should sever ties with Israel and moderately improved data from 2012 showing the number to be 51.3 %, ³⁷ the current state of this damaged relationship and provocative rhetoric adopted by both sides seem hardly surprising.

Turkey utilised its NATO veto to prevent the inclusion of Israel in the alliance as a reaction to the aforementioned issues. Erdoğan has taken a strong position regarding this matter, stating that; "We have our own red lines. For us, to be involved in NATO with Israel is never considerable. To be with such a cruel understanding would conflict with our structure, history and culture."³⁸ That said, despite these tensions, in December 2012 Ankara agreed to retract their NATO veto preventing Israeli participation in non-military NATO activities in 2013. If such a result appears at odds with previous diplomatic and political developments between Israel and Turkey since 2008, that's because it is. The NATO approval of Turkey's Patriot missile request in order to defend its borders from Syrian encroachment was read as a timely and coincidental development, leading to assumptions in Israeli diplomatic circles that this issue has been used as leverage to coerce Erdoğan into

34 "Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Interview by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu", Op cit.

35 Metropol - Stratejik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar, Op cit.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 "Turkey 'blocked' Israeli NATO steps", *The Hürriyet Daily News*, February 6th 2013, Available at: <http://www.Hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-blocked-israeli-natosteps.aspxpageID=238&nID=40566&NewsCatID=33>.

appeasement.³⁹ Davutoğlu flatly denied such assertions, claiming that the Israeli media “conducted an operation”,⁴⁰ presumably aimed at undermining Turkey’s international credibility. Although this has not been articulated by leaders in either Turkey or Israel, the deployment of Patriot missiles is an important move from Turkey. Syria, Iran and Russia have been highly critical of this step and relations have deteriorated as a result. The Patriot missiles would not only protect Turkey, but also Israel if problems with neighbours such as Iran and Syria continue to deteriorate at their current pace. For those who adhere to the pendulum theory, or shifting axis thesis, this event should place Turkey firmly back in the Western camp. Furthermore, the role of America in negotiating a rare concession from Turkey during this time of political turmoil highlights a key variable in Turkish-Israeli relations; the U.S. This event once again reveals the lack of “alliance” between Turkey and Israel, rather the tenuous and ever fluctuating “alignment”⁴¹ regarding international affairs based on a mutual reliance on the U.S. This further demonstrates that Turkish-Israeli relations may not have been subject to the dramatic fluctuations they appear to have, due to the lack of solid foundations to begin with.

Once again, the role of the U.S. in negotiating and determining the alliance between its two key regional allies has come to the fore. Obama’s trip to Israel in March, 2013, finally saw the Israeli state taking the monumental step of conceding to Turkish demands regarding post-Mavi Marmara normalisation, beginning to thaw the three year long diplomatic ice-age. In response to this long awaited apology and agreement to pay compensation, Erdoğan has agreed to normalise ties between the two countries, also cancelling the highly contentious legal proceedings against the Israeli soldiers involved in the attack. From first glance, it would seem that geo-strategic realities have pushed egoism to the side, with both Netanyahu and Erdoğan blessing their newly established ties as “vital and strategic for regional peace and security,”⁴² referring to the increasing mutual threat of a nuclear Iran and chemically armed militia in Syria, particularly to Israel. Thus, the timing of this apology is hardly surprising. However, Erdoğan’s domestic gains from not accepting Israel’s apology would have been extensive. So what pushed the AKP to do so? Aside from heat from the U.S, the regional security concerns discussed earlier in this chapter and Turkey’s energy concerns which are addressed in the next

39 Leila Krieger, H. “Israel to join NATO activities amidst Turkey tension”, *The Jerusalem Post*, December 23rd 2012, Available at: <http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAnd-Politics/Article.aspx?id=297004>.

40 “Turkey: Israel’s participation in NATO not related to Patrots”, *Today’s Zaman*, December 20th 2012, Available at: http://www.todayszaman.com/mobile_detail.action?newsId=302441.

41 Bengio, Ofra, and Gencer Özcan. “Changing Relations: Turkish-Israeli-Arab Triangle”, *New Trends in Turkish Foreign Affairs: Bridges and Boundaries*, 2002: 338.

42 “Israeli PM apologizes to Turkey after Obama push”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 22nd 2013, Available at: <http://www.Hurriyetdailynews.com/israeli-pm-apologizes-to-turkey-after-obama-push.aspx?pageID=238&nID=43445&NewsCatID=352>.

section were the primary factors. Firstly, the AKP is pushing to diversify its energy relations, solving its over-reliance on Russia and Iran, an move which impels cooperation with Israel. Secondly, the aforementioned use of chemical weapons in Syria was a factor as intelligence sharing is highly beneficial for Turkey due to Israel's more extensive intelligence gathering methods and increasing fear from both sides that this conflict will spill over Syria's borders. Thus, Turkey as well as Israel had a lot to gain from rekindling relations; namely resuming its post as regional mediator, perhaps making some headway regarding NATO cooperation on Syria and finally, increasing trust and therefore cooperation with the U.S, a necessity for the development of any viable peace-process in Palestine, something Turkey has a great interest in establishing. Turkey has held this apology up as exemplary of their growing regional power, with Erdoğan stating shortly after the event that "We are at the beginning of a process of elevating Turkey to a position so that it will again have a say, initiative and power, as it did in the past."⁴³ This apology does indeed have the potential to re-establish Turkey as a regional mediator or even role model, which in turn, will solidify Turkish-Israeli relations due to mutual reliance and realigning strategies regarding the current transformations taking place in Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. Even so, it seems that re-establishing the glory days of the 1990s is no longer a possibility, as President Abdullah Gül made clear in a predictive, if possibly normative statement that "Turkish-Israeli relations can never be as before from now on."⁴⁴

The domestic timing was also prime within Israel as Netanyahu's success during the elections facilitated this apology due to his relative safety from nationalist criticism and the current corruption scandal surrounding Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who has long stood as an obstacle to Turkish-Israeli rapprochement. It is important to briefly discuss the role of Israel's internal politics here as often, Turkish behaviour is reactive rather than active in this regard. The instability of Israeli politics impels both inflammatory rhetoric and extremism during domestic policy formation. The successive election of increasingly right-wing politicians and "hawks" in Israel is unsurprisingly, a concern for Turkey and a cause of public consternation as their draconian policies are put into effect in Palestine. It has been argued on multiple occasions that the timing of both Operation Cast Lead and the most recent Operation Pillar of Defence came just before elections in Israel. Furthermore, both elections heavily impacted on the decision to withhold an apology for so long. Once again, it was internal as well as international factors which dictated its deliverance as Obama and Netanyahu had hoped to dissuade

43 "Erdoğan says Israeli apology shows Turkey's new clout", *The Daily Star*, March 23rd, 2013, Available at: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Mar-23/211253-erdogan-says-israeli-apology-shows-turkeys-new-clout.ashx#axzz2SEEVb4DP>.

44 Migdalovitz, C., "Israel's Blockade of Gaza, the Mavi Marmara Incident, and Its Aftermath", *Congressional Research Service Report for Congress*, June 16th, 2010.

Erdoğan from his forthcoming visit to Gaza, during which he will meet leaders from both the PA and Hamas, something Israel has a strong interest in preventing as Erdoğan's planned meeting with Hamas would endow them with further legitimacy both domestically and internationally. So far, Erdoğan plans to continue with this visit, keeping diplomatic relations on a low heat, stating that actions required to fully re-establish ties, such as appointing ambassadors, requires more time and planning. Abdullah Gül re-articulated such sentiments, stating that "The issue is still very fresh, let's all wait. This is just the first step."⁴⁵ Such statements are perhaps reflective of the AKP's understanding the public resentment at the Israeli states' actions will not necessarily dissipate at the same rate as diplomatic ties are rekindled. Although no longer frozen, such a cool attitude towards this monumental effort to re-start relations should caution academics and political analysts alike not to rejoice too soon.

Erdoğan continues to use a similar discourse to the one before Israel's apology, now alongside a new, victorious language due to his success in securing unprecedented Israeli concessions. This is highlighted best by examining the billboards appearing around Ankara city centre which depict a forlorn Netanyahu under a triumphant Erdoğan, stating first that "Israel apologised to Turkey", followed by an address from Ankara municipality; "Dear Mr Prime Minister, for you to enable us feel such pride, we are grateful to you." Such triumphalism has resounded from Erdoğan since this event, including statements inferring that this apology signals the start of a new epoch in which the balance of power has shifted in Turkey's favour. Similarly, Erdoğan's highly controversial statement that "Zionism is equal to fascism" highlights how normalised unmoderated discourse has become within Turkish political circles. Although since Netanyahu and Erdoğan have begun talking, Erdoğan has sought to clarify these statements, he has not retracted them, stating that "My several statements openly condemning anti-Semitism clearly display my position on this issue. In this context, I stand behind my remarks in [the United Nations Conference in] Vienna."⁴⁶ Underlining such discursive landmines are ongoing potent problems such as the ever static peace-process, ongoing settlement building in occupied territory painting a dismal picture regarding the chances of a viable Palestinian state and of course, Turkey's domestic gains from vitriolic discourse. Similarly, there remains both a public and state mistrust of Israel's promises which has impelled the aforementioned caution until Israel actually fulfils its commitments. Turkish public opinion and thus, state discourse if not policy, will not accept Israel if it is not seen to be making resolution efforts

45 "Israel's apology to shift Mideast balances: Turkish PM", *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 27th 2013, Available at: <http://www.Hurriyetdailynews.com/israels-apology-to-shift-mideast-balances-turkish-pm.aspx?pageID=238&nid=43713>.

46 Keinon, H., "Netanyahu apologizes to Turkey over Gaza flotilla", *The Jerusalem Post*, March 23rd, 2013, Available at: <http://www.jpost.com/International/Obama-Netanyahu-Erdogan-speak-by-phone-307423>.

with Palestine. Thus, normalisation is more dependent on Israeli policy than on Turkish at this point in time.

Although the Israeli government has fully agreed to two of Turkey's three demands, they have faltered on the final, and most demanding stipulation; that Israel fully removes the Gaza blockade as a precursor to reviving formal diplomatic ties such as appointing ambassadors. Although Israel has agreed to, and begun to ease of the blockade and an end to the blockade on civilian goods, such statements have been made before by the Israeli government with little or no follow-up. As such, Erdoğan's visit to Gaza will focus on witnessing the extent of Israel's fulfilment of the third criteria. It will be this final demand which dictates the future of Turkish-Israeli relations. So long as Israel continues any form of blockade against Gaza, Turkey is has no imperative to push for full re-establishment of relations, nor will such relations receive much domestic legitimacy. Thus, although arguably warranted, for full normalisation of relations, Ankara needs to reduce its demands on the Israeli government, namely, the request that Israel fully removes the blockade on Gaza before diplomatic relations can fully resume, an unlikely occurrence based on even a cursory evaluation of Israeli actions, particularly settlement activities in occupied territories, particularly since Abbas's successful bid for statehood at the UN. The level of confrontation incorporated into the rhetoric is, at the time of writing, standing in the way of resuming necessary diplomatic relations. Despite the positive effects of such actions and discourse on Turkey's regional standing and on appeasing public opinion at home by diverting public attention, such absolute rhetoric is also preventing Turkey from emerging as the strong regional mediator that was its previous role, negotiating with Israeli, Syria and Iran, and taking the lead during core Arab-Israel peace talks.

If Israel wishes to improve its relations with Turkey, it needs to be aware that Turkey, as a rare ally in the region, is constrained and provoked by a number of social and ideational variables, particularly in continuing to seek the fulfilment of all three post-Mavi Marmara stipulations as not doing so would have lost Erdoğan much needed domestic legitimacy. With the recent apology from Netanyahu and acceptance from Erdoğan both countries have demonstratively employed a hedonistic calculus to determine whether the domestic benefits of their feud outweighed the strategic benefits of normalising relations, finding the former to be lacking substance when compared to pressing regional concerns. As such, we may see the temporary establishment of a relationship resembling the "golden era" with strategic threat perception once again dominating the agenda. However, the recent apology will not suffice entirely, nor will it placate public opinion in either country. It is also important for both countries to recognise this issue not only to be a matter of international law and human rights, but also of national dignity, egoism and historical memory. This is just one small step on a very long road to recovering normal relations, if such a thing has ever in fact existed between Turkey and Israel. Solving the Mavi Marmara crisis does little to address the multitude of other issues discussed in this chapter, which cause divergences between these two powers and as such, should not be overplayed. As aforementioned, a state heavy reconciliation

bid will not be, and indeed was not, accepted by society. Both the Turkish and the Israeli rejection of the legitimacy of such an approach highlights the need for more society based cooperation and therefore, reconciliation.

Business as Usual

It was the worst of times, it was the best of times

Having discussed the fluctuations and limitation of Turkish-Israeli political relations and the instability between these two contrasting powers, it is now time to juxtapose this with economic relations, highlighting the sharp dichotomy between political rhetoric and actions, and economic cooperation. The spectres of Operation Cast Lead, Davos and Mavi Marmara, although haunting discourse and diplomacy, have had a negligible impact on blossoming trade relations between Turkey and Israel.

With trade relations only having been established to any significant degree in 1996, after the signing of the free trade agreement, Turkish-Israeli economic cooperation has been upgraded in as remarkable a fashion as political relations were downgraded. Starting from \$449 million in 1996, bilateral trade has flourished between Turkey and Israel under the AKP's jurisdiction. In 2011, the last recorded statistics on the Ministry of Economy, imports from Israel stood at \$2 billion with \$2.4 billion being exported to Israel (it is notable that no such statistics are offered for 2012 however). This phenomenal growth all during a time which by all accounts, is the worst period of Turkish-Israeli relations since the states inception. Between 2002 and 2008, a period in which political relations were taut, but not catastrophic, bilateral trade increased by 14.6 %. Although, the growth rate in 2009 fell quite dramatically, by 28 %, this was attributed to the global financial crisis rather than political relations by Uriel Lynn, the president of the Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce.⁴⁷ By 2010, bilateral trade was back to its previous level, with a 30.7 % increase seen between 2010 and 2011, the most political tumultuous time for Turkish-Israeli relations.

As aforementioned, 2008 and 2010, two of the worst times for bilateral diplomatic relations in Turkish-Israeli history, also saw some of the best times for economic cooperation, far exceeding the bilateral trade seen pre-Mavi Marmara. Furthermore, although military activities were cancelled after Mavi Marmara, defence contracts were not. Just a month after this incident, Turkey's \$183 million contract with Israeli Aerospace Industries and Elbit was fulfilled. Similarly, the multiple partnerships between Turkish and Israeli firms, particularly in the areas of defence, automotive and technology industries, continue unabated, such as the deal between Turkish Aselsan and Israeli Military Industries to upgrade

47 Wrobel, S., "Investment firm: Divest from Turkey", *The Jerusalem Post*, June 6th 2010, Available at: <http://www.jpost.com/LandedPages/PrintArticle.aspx?id=177120>.

battle tanks.⁴⁸ Similarly, Turkish participation in an Israeli company Better Place's production of the Renault-Nissan Fluence Z.E. and electric cars, which are currently being manufactured in Bursa continues unhindered.⁴⁹ Such joint ventures are common, although Israeli companies see it as in their best interests to conceal their identity whilst working in Turkey by cooperating with Turkish manufacturers. This means Israeli products are expansive in Turkey, particularly regarding medical and advanced software technology, although this is not obvious in the manufacturing details. Despite the post-Mavi Marmara ban on cooperation in the fields of water and energy, much of the equipment used for agricultural and water technology is supplied by Israel directly to local Turkish administrations.⁵⁰ The Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD) spoke out in 2012 about such ties, encouraging greater integration with and business cooperation with Israel, citing it as a priority investment partner.⁵¹ Thus, the integrated partnerships between Turkish and Israeli private companies would seem to be superseding political conflict but also, if dependency theorists are right, making the risks of it greater as Turkey and Israel become more economically, if not politically or ideationally interdependent.

If this is beginning to look like a praising account of the invisible hand thesis, it is not. Such economic progress has been intimately linked to government control and encouragement, even at a time when Erdoğan and Netanyahu have sought to distance themselves from each other ideationally and politically. An example of this can be found in 2012, when Halman Aldubi, an Israeli investment firm, announced that it would divest from Turkey in reaction to Turkey's objection to the Mavi Marmara incident, stating that "Turkey is on a militant path aimed at strategically damaging Israel, and there is no reason for Israeli investment houses to help the Turkish economy."⁵² They urged other investment houses to coordinate with this plan, until Turkey adopts a new, more pro-Israeli policy. This was followed swiftly by pressure from Uriel Lynn on the business sector to refrain from letting political relations damage economic ones. This statement was made in co-ordination with a call for his Turkish counterpart; Rifat Hisarcıkhoğlu, president of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges, to do the same. Incidentally, Hisarcıkhoğlu has repeatedly assured that political instability will not damage the

48 Enginsoy, U., "Turkey's Military programs with Israel Remain in Place", *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 3rd 2010, Available at: <http://www.Hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=military-programs-with-israel-remain-in-place-2010-06-03>.

49 Gultekin, B., "Turkey-Israel: Toward a Decoupling of Economics from Politics", *Hürriyet Daily News*, July 9th 2011, Available at: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R41275.pdf>.

50 Ibid.

51 Yinanc, B., "Top Bosses Eye Smart Investments", *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 21st 2012, Available at: <http://www.Hurriyetdailynews.com/top-bosses-eye-smart-investments.aspxpageID=238&nID=16499&NewsCatID=345>.

52 Wrobel, S. Op cit.

ever increasingly economic ties between these two countries. Such statements seem to be in effect as Turkish contracting and consultancy in Israel reached \$1.03 billion in 2011, with investment increasing concurrently.⁵³ As Turkey emerged in 2011 as Israel's 6th largest export market,⁵⁴ the necessities of such statements are resoundingly clear. Furthermore, the context of the global financial crisis and particularly, European recession is crucial here. As previously discussed, Turkey is attempting to develop, at least partially, a post-EU economic outlook given their enduring economic vulnerability. Turkey's recent recovery from the catastrophic 2001 financial crisis necessitates stable economic relations, and internationalised, diversified investment and exports. Israel is a crucial market in this regards (although still only 17th largest export market for Turkey in 2011⁵⁵), and vice versa due to both of their reliance on exporting to Europe, and the increased risk posed by diminishing markets in Europe. Thus, economic ties, as opposed to the military relations of the 1990s, seem to be the dominant and defining feature of Turkish-Israeli relations in the new millennium.

The US-Turkey-Israel triad is also exemplary of the second point of this chapter, that despite public opinion necessitating the secession of diplomatic relations, military and economic necessities supersede ideational factors in many circumstances. This can be seen most recently as, after pressure from the U.S, the Israeli Ministry of Defence dropped the newly established block on sales of weapons and defence technology to Turkey. This ban, according to a Turkish defence procurement official, was aimed at punishing Turkey, however the Israeli MoD "eventually came to the conclusion that this would only harm their own interests," further asserting that "At stake was the corporate reputation of Israeli weapons makers."⁵⁶ With two of Israel's main defence companies and U.S weapons makers; Elta and Elbit, having lost \$55 million and \$90 million respectively,⁵⁷ it seems hardly surprising that it became evident that continuing the ban would be detrimental to both Israeli and U.S economic interests. Furthermore, in terms of Turkish-U.S strategic cooperation, Turkey's membership in NATO and its geo-strategic significance mean that withholding the AEW&C defence systems from Turkey (and thus, implicitly NATO), which shares borders with two of the most dangerous countries in the world in U.S and Israel eyes; Iran and Syria, was not a pragmatic reaction to diplomatic difficulties.

53 Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy, Available at: <http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions&country=IL®ion=4>.

54 Çağaptay, Soner, and Tyler Evans, "The Unexpected Vitality of Turkish-Israeli Trade", *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 2012, p. 2.

55 Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy, Op cit.

56 Bekdil, B., "Israel abandons block on sales to Turkish AWACS", *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 22nd 2013, Available at: <http://www.Hurriyetdailynews.com/israel-abandons-block-on-sales-to-turkish-awacs.aspx?PageID=238&NID=41633&NewsCategoryId=344>.

57 Ibid.

As the above examples demonstrate, we can see that despite the relative autonomy of private companies from political fluctuations, this is not an all-encompassing rule. The Israeli court's decision to freeze the assets of Turkish company, Yilmazlar, came under harsh criticism from the Turkish Foreign Trade Minister, Zafer Çağlayan, who requested that the Israeli government stops confusing political relations with commercial ties.⁵⁸ This highlights the underlying rationale behind the dichotomy between economic and political relations with Israel, with Turkey perceiving them as separate and abstract affairs. Thus, whilst the effect of political relations on trade on the Turkish side can still be said to be negligible, the same cannot be said for the tourism industry which has suffered palpable losses since 2010. Consequently, the main domestic impact of frozen diplomatic relations is significant damage to the previously thriving tourism industry between Turkey and Israel. Turkish Tourism Minister, Ertuğrul Günay stated that; "We have lost a total of 400,000 [people] from Israel."⁵⁹ This is unsurprising given that the Israeli Foreign Ministry warned, from the day of the flotilla incident onwards, that citizens should not travel to Turkey due to fear over "outbreaks of violence against Israelis."⁶⁰ Such warnings have continued into 2012, in which Ministry statements advise against non-essential travel to Turkey. As a result of this, Turkey's tourism industry is suffering hundreds of millions of U.S dollars in lost revenue.

Furthermore, despite well achieved growth rates, the level of trade between these two countries still falls short of Turkey's other neighbours such as Iran and the EU, although this can largely be attributed to the size of the markets. However, this can also be viewed in historical context as due to the fragile nature of Turkish-Israeli political relations and lack of effective investment lobbies. Similarly, since much of the imports from Israel are of a military nature, and thus distinctly separate from civil-society, increasing societal influence on foreign policy orientation is going to mirror their consumer trends, which are not overtly directed at Israel. The AKP's increased efforts of civilianisation, in an attempt to "confine the army to their barracks",⁶¹ and subsequent de-securitisation of foreign-policy leaves much less room for Israel in the new millennium than during the golden age, wherein, despite having an avowedly anti-Israeli government, security realities and military power necessitated good relations with Israel. Thus, as we have argued, the democratic development pursued by the AKP and the realignment of

58 "Silk Road Economy & Business Report 2010.06.11 – 2010.06.17", *Silk Road Foundation*, 2010. p. 53.

59 "Turkey sees 2 mln drop in tourism due to crises", *Hürriyet Daily News*, August 21st 2012, Available at: <http://www.Hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-sees-2-mln-drop-in-tourism-due-to-crises.aspx?pageID=238&nID=28215&NewsCatID=379>.

60 Blumenkrant, Z., "Israelis Told to Avoid Turkey Travel, but Not Everybody Takes Heed", *Haaretz*, June 1, 2010, Available at, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israelis-told-to-avoid-turkey-travel-but-not-everybody-takes-heed-1.293410>.

61 Posch, W., "Crisis in Turkey: just another bump on the road to Europe?", *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, 2007. p. 12.

foreign-policy to fit, in part, with societal demands effectively laid the foundations for the downgrading of Turkish-Israeli relations, even before the series of dramatic events that was Operation Cast Lead, Davos and the Mavi Marmara incident began the diplomatic ice age. As Davutoğlu points out; “Turkey is a living example of how important it is to expand the space of freedoms to realize the full potential of a society. Turkey has, in this regard, also managed to de-securitise its foreign policy understanding, which allows us to see our neighbourhood through the prism of opportunities rather than a perception of threat.”⁶² The post-liberalisation emergence of society as a foreign-policy actor had a significant impact on the development of Turkey’s moral/ethical discourse regarding human (and particularly Palestinian) rights. These societal influences have also stimulated other policies, which in this context, have emerged as economic growth, renewing relations with vital economic partners such as Iran and Russia, with whom Turkey has vast amounts of trade and also a no-visa agreement. Both of these developments are particularly alienating regarding the continuation of Turkish-Israeli ties. Thus, it would seem that the best opportunity for the successful revival of diplomatic ties is through more extensive trade cooperation.

The recent discovery of an estimated 122 trillion cubic feet of natural gas just off the coast of Israel and Cyprus forms yet another impelling reason for Ankara to tone down the rhetoric, a necessity if it is to continue attempts to establish itself as a regional energy hub and diversify its energy imports, both of which would be severely inhibited by Turkey’s alienation from Israel. If Turkey mends relations with Israel and takes part in this joint venture, a more stable and enduring strategic/economic partnership could be on the horizon. Further to this, the ever intractable conflict over Cyprus poses as strategic threat to Turkey’s energy aspirations as the possibility of a Cypriot-Greek-Israeli “axis” becomes increasingly likely. Turkey briefly experience of this possibility in 2010 when the Greek-Cypriot government began drilling activities under the protection of the Israeli marine and air force.⁶³ The consequences of such an alliance would likely entrench Turkish-Iranian energy relations and further threaten Israel both strategically and ideationally. The geopolitics of West Asian energy resources are beyond the scope of this chapter, however it is important to note that given the Persian basin and the Caspian region contain two-thirds of the worlds proven petroleum reserves, links between Turkey and Iran are imperative. Israel needs to read this as part of the strategic move to become a regional transit hub, rather than as a symbol of Muslim alliances which exclude Israel’s participation and damage Turkish-Israeli relations.

Energy is a potent political issue in Turkey as much of the nations debt it due to their complete reliance on oil and gas imports. Coming almost entirely from Iran and Russia, and at no good price, gas in Turkey is more expensive than anywhere

62 “Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Interview by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu”, Op cit.

63 “Turkey in 2011”, *SETA Policy Report*, SETA Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, www.setav.org | January 2012.

else in the world, a constant thorn in the AKP's side as it creates a considerable amount of public animosity. Israel's recent discovery of natural gas just off their Eastern Mediterranean coast forms yet another impelling reason to increase trade cooperation between the two countries. The Tamar field alone holds an estimated 8.5 trillion cubic feet of gas and exports have already begun. The Leviathan field will not be in production for around 3 years but holds an estimated 18 trillion cubic feet. Israel is equally reliant on Turkey due to its natural suitability as a transport hub between West Asia and Europe. Thus the recent attempts at reconciliation between the two countries can be seen as a result of energy and trade necessities, a more pressing concern due to Turkey's booming economy, and thus abundant and low-cost export opportunities as well as Israel's ever increasing regional insecurity since the Arab spring and lack of viable alternative options due to Greece and Cyprus's economic collapse. Trade superseding political difficulties can once again be brought attention to as although this may have been a factor in Israel's surprising apology, export contracts were already being signed before this event, once again highlighting Turkey's willingness or need to continue economic links with Israel despite political turmoil.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified the crucial variables and actors defining Turkish-Israeli bilateral relations, revealing relations to be both complex and relatively shallow. It has evaluated the dichotomy between political discourse and economic practice and found it to be both stark and unsurprising, given the global and domestic socio-political and economic variables affecting the relationship. Thus, despite the vitriolic language, particularly from Turkey, the continued level of economic ties between the two countries would seem to indicate that, except for a few core examples, practice rarely follows closely to rhetoric. Similarly, the continued growth and the way such economic relations were established, under AKP jurisdiction, goes a way to critiquing the shifting axis theory which both simplifies and Orientalises the decision making process in Turkey. The deterioration of Turkish-Israeli relations are very revealing regarding both domestic transformations, the nature of the AKP's power and their foreign-policy objectives, as well as regional developments. Diplomatic tensions and the subsequent deterioration of relations did not occur in isolation. It has been argued that such transformations were created and engendered through social and political discourse and practice, on both sides of the divide, and thus, international relations cannot be abstracted from the social domestic processes which define it. The deterioration in Turkish-Israeli relations cannot be attributed to ideological divides, or indeed, any of the oft employed dichotomies. The fluctuations in Turkish foreign-policy making are instead reflective of the changing political opportunity structure resulting from civilianisation and de-securitisation in the AKP era, as well as a changing political structure in Turkey. Nor are either side's changes as pre-meditated as they are portrayed to be. This chapter argues that as the arguable demise of "zero problems", Davutoğlu

is formulating foreign-policy in a somewhat ad-hoc way, responding to situations as and when they arise with limited thought as to the long term implications of controversial decision making, particularly regarding Israel. Thus, the dynamics of Turkish-Israeli relations are influenced by innumerable social, political and economic forces, both endogenous and exogenous. Notably, the formulation of foreign policy is intimately linked to fluctuating event interpretation, actor and threat perception and social processes of historical memory. Theoretically, analysis of the fluctuating political opportunity structure and decision making process in Turkey is rewarding. It eschews the dominant realist paradigm and highlights the need for socio-political and cultural analysis which leaves room for understanding the complex and interdependent relationship between the public sphere and international relations.

Furthermore, there appears to be a significant degree of continuity rather than change in Turkish-Israeli relations. From this analysis, the so-called golden era presents itself as more of an anomaly than current turbulent relations. The loss of enthusiasm regarding Turkish-Israeli relations can be attributed to wide-ranging environmental factors, the most important of which is the perception of diplomatic relations to be detrimental to Turkey's standing in the Arab world, and also, to public opinion. Concurrently, Davutoğlu's strategic depth perception seems to have determined such relations to be somewhat unnecessary to the continuation of the necessary military and economic partnerships. The move away from Israel, and implicitly, the U.S, despite its mediation efforts, represents a changing paradigm in Turkish Foreign Policy formation in the new millennium, based on autonomous and increasingly self-confident policy-making grounded in strategic, geopolitical, economic and also, to an extent, ideational realities. The U.S has attempted intense negotiation to re-establish the Turkish-U.S-Israeli axis of the glory days, to no avail until very recently. This highlights that the perceived victory of U.S diplomacy may be no such thing at all as environmental factors both in and around the two countries seems mainly have dictated both the deliverance and acceptance of the apology. Similarly, the core issues preventing the full re-establishment of diplomatic relations; namely that none of the reconciliation criteria has actually been fulfilled as yet, Abbas' recent success at the U.N and the aftermath of settlement expansion are simply too substantial. Combined with the AKP's will to distance itself from the U.S administration, in order to depart from what is perceived by the Turkish public as an enduring tradition of American puppetry in West Asia, the chance that the U.S can play a mediating role between Turkey and Israel, rather than simply directing Israel as seems to have been the case most recently, is negligible, compared with the much more impelling internal issues which seem to have delivered some kind of resolution in this matter.

Turkish previous resistance to U.S. reconciliation attempts must be contextualised within a few core global and local transformations; first of all, the global financial crisis which has undermined U.S and EU economic hegemony whilst simultaneously allowing for the opportunity of emerging economies such as

Turkey to take a more active and autonomous economic and political role. The implications of which are as discussed above, but most notably, the development of strong economic ties and improving diplomatic relations with countries aggressive to Israel, notably Iran, Syria and Palestine. The second important issue relates to domestic transformations. The on-going tug-of-war over political identities within Turkey necessitates the use of foreign-policy as an electoral tool. By invoking populist discourse and developing a more reactive foreign-policy, Turkey may well have demonstrated their democratic capacity, however, potentially at the risk of long term gains. Constructing such a strong anti-Israeli national narrative now means that opportunities for negotiation and diplomatic relations are severely constrained by public opinion. The rise of civil, rather than coercive military power in Turkey has had a dramatic effect on the objectives and implementation of foreign-policy. The effects expand regionally, as Turkey increases efforts to portray itself as a model in post-revolutionary Arab Spring countries, part of which hinges on maintaining a credible and democratic position towards Israel, which at this stage, entails ideological distance and populist discourse. Contrasts, between actions and rhetoric, should be perceived as demonstrative of the difficult tight-rope which the AKP must negotiate. At once, they are subject to the ebb and flow of public opinion, particularly due to the rise of civil-society and private corporate actors with varied interests. Simultaneously, they must balance these social demands with the demands of being a prominent actor in the international system, maintaining an equilibrium between the varied opportunities and constraint posed by the Arab Spring and the dramatic economic changes of the last ten years.

Turkey has a promising role as regional mediator and potentially, benign hegemon (if such a thing can exist), utilising “soft power” to stabilise its volatile regional environment. However, Turkey must rekindle its relationship with Israel if it is to have the continued support of the U.S and the EU, both important to the effective extension of Turkish “soft power” or implementation of the “zero problems” policy. The very emergence of Turkey in this role reflects the rapid transformations of Turkey’s traditionally insular foreign policy of the Kemalist era. Turkey’s active mediation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the core reasons for such one sided rhetoric now, due to the failures of such activities and the attribution of blame to Israel. Given this chapter argues that the transformation of Turkish foreign-policy towards Israel in the AKP era has been part of a bottom up, societal transformation, the same could be said of the solution. Increasing economic, intellectual and cultural ties between these two countries should lay a much better foundation than the tenuous military basis of the “golden age” allegiance. The social and psychological damage caused by the main encounters discussed in this chapter will not dissolve independently. If the AKP is to re-establish relations with Israel in a more durable and open fashion, they must transform societal attitudes in concurrence with the development of their own rhetoric and policy, which is in accordance both with society and with Turkey’s larger regional role.

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